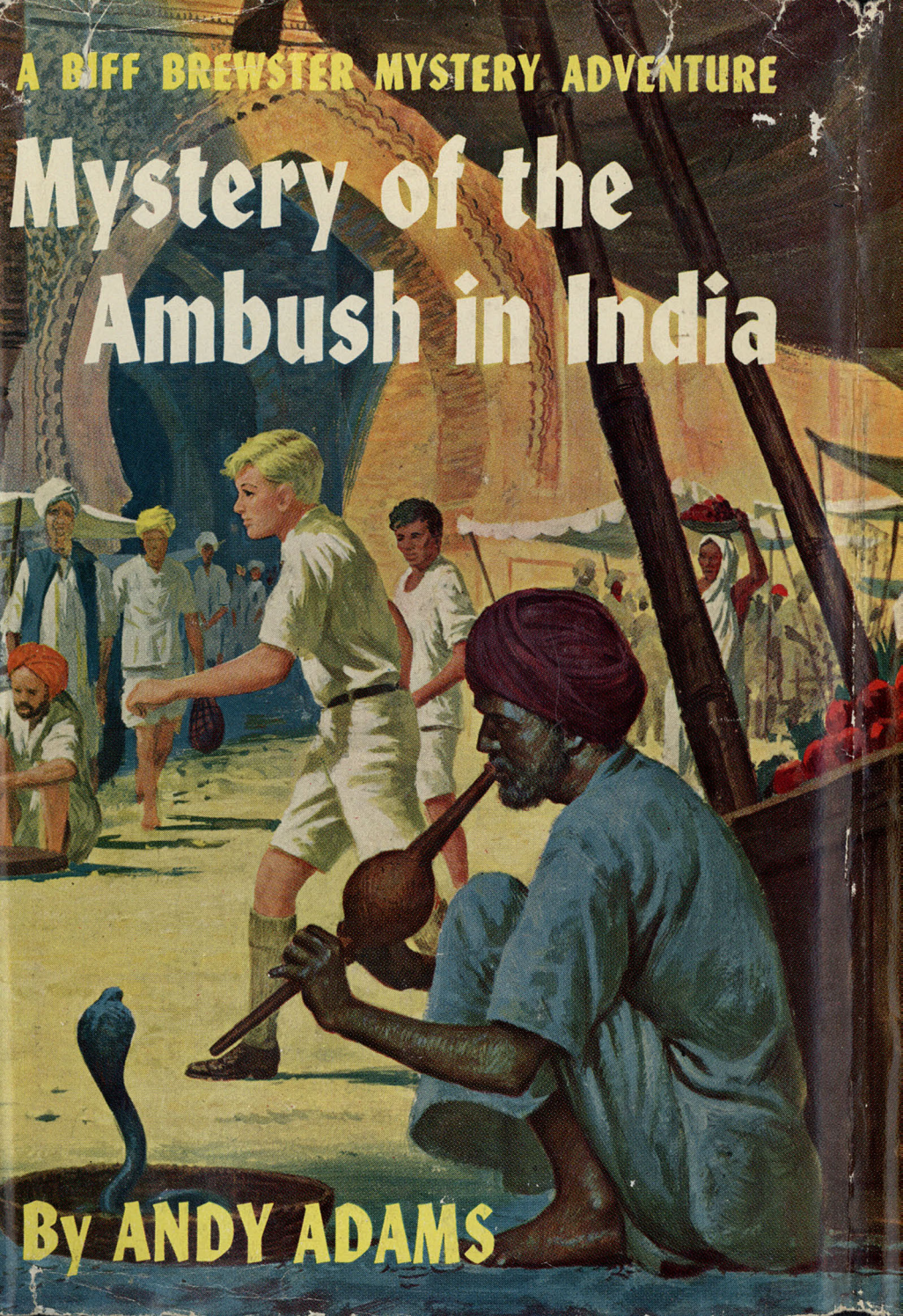
A BIFF BREWSTER MYSTERY ADVENTURE

Mystery of the Ambush in India



By ANDY ADAMS

A Biff Brewster Mystery Adventure

MYSTERY OF THE AMBUSH IN INDIA

By ANDY ADAMS

MYSTERIOUS INDIA is the scene of Biff Brewster's latest adventure. With Kamuka and Likake, his companions of the exciting days in Brazil and Hawaii, Biff is traveling by freighter to meet his father. But a puzzling message directs the boys instead to the teeming New India Bazaar in Calcutta. There Biff sees for the first time the Indian boy Chandra, who later saves Biff's life by means of a desperate, clever trick.

In the shadowy warehouse of D. Chand & Bros., Biff is entrusted with the fabulous blood-red ruby, the Light of the Lama. Accompanied by Kamuka and Chandra, Biff sets out along the Grand Trunk Road to return the ruby to its rightful owner, the Chonsi Lama, ruler of the lost city of Chonsi.

Ambushed in a ruined temple by converging bands of murderous thugs, attacked by a man-eating tiger, and menaced by the *Yeti* — the "Abominable Snowman," the boys overcome almost insurmountable odds to accomplish their mission. When at last they come into the presence of the Chonsi Lama, an unpredictable and terrifying enemy almost costs them their lives.

Young readers will be unable to put down this swift-paced, spine-tingling story of mystery and intrigue in modern India.

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Mystery Adventures

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Biff Brewster, sixteen, is a tall, strongly built blond youth who lives in Indianapolis, Indiana, with his parents and the eleven-year-old twins, Ted and Monica. Because his mother and father believe that travel is as important to education as formal schooling, Biff is encouraged to travel to various countries during the vacation months. His experiences in these lands, and the young people he meets there, form the basis of a new series for adventure-loving readers. In every journey there is a strong element of mystery, usually a direct result of conditions peculiar to the region in which he is traveling. Thus, in addition to adventure, these books impart carefully researched information about foreign countries.

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Mystery of the Ambush in India

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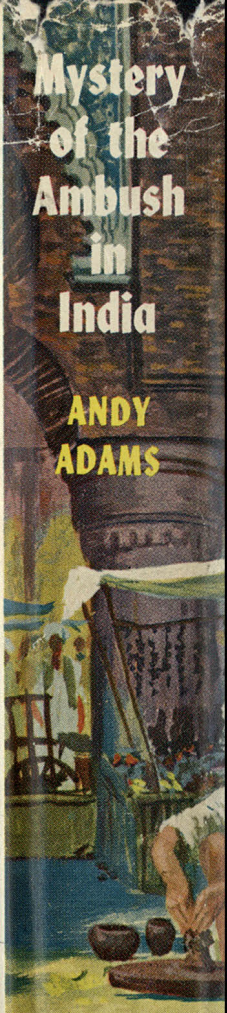

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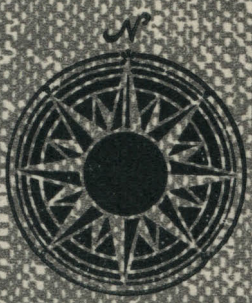
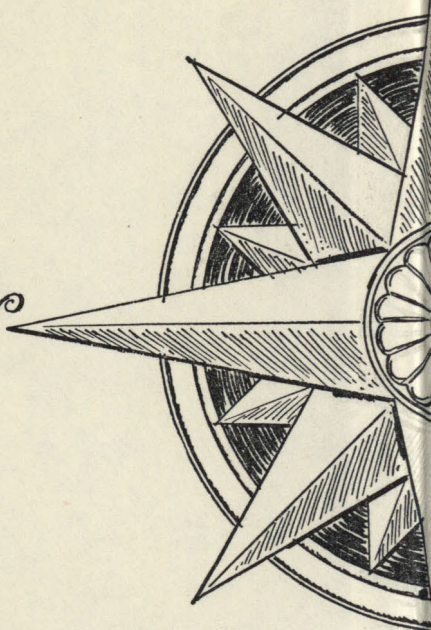
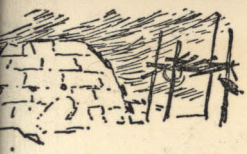
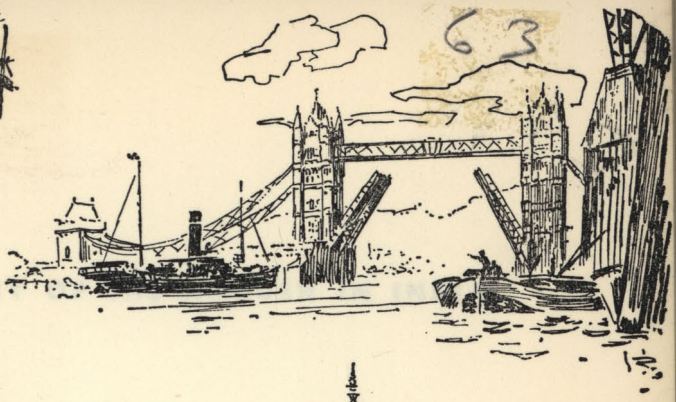
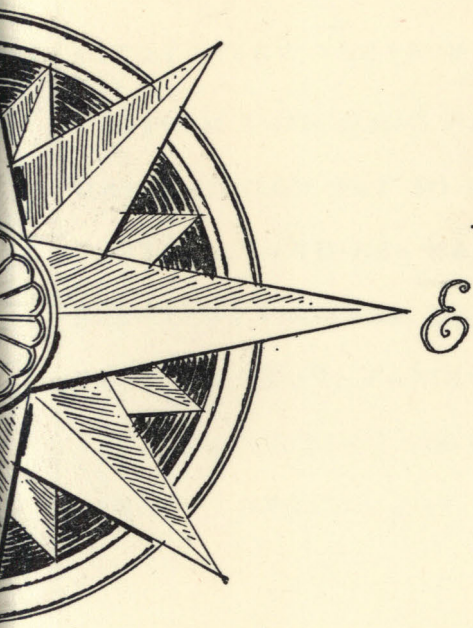


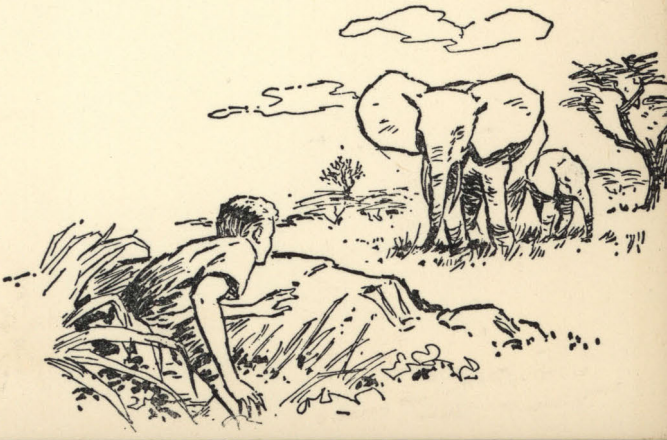
MYSTERY ADVENTURE

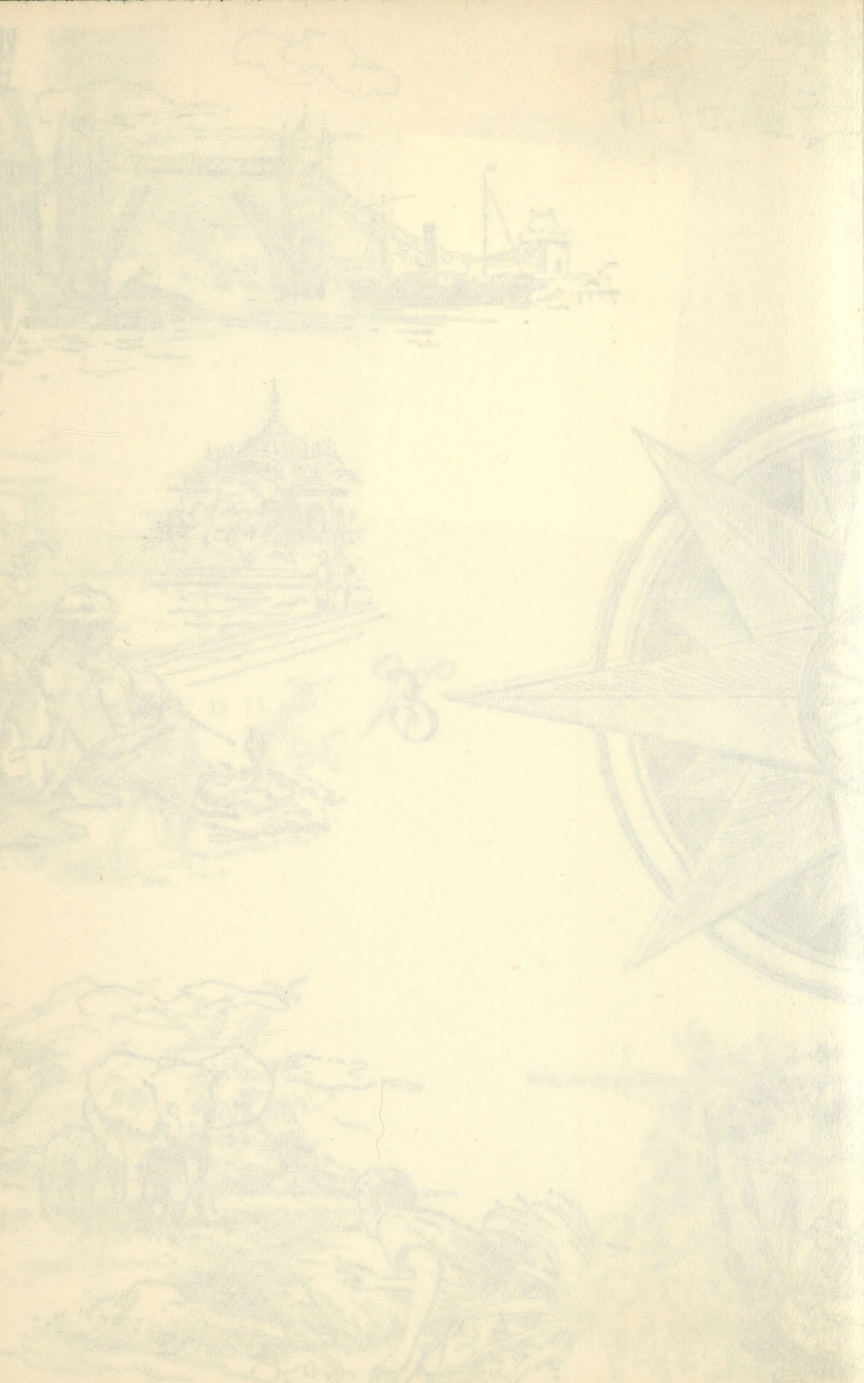












MYSTERY OF THE AMBUSH IN INDIA

BIFF BREWSTER MYSTERY ADVENTURES

BRAZILIAN GOLD MINE MYSTERY

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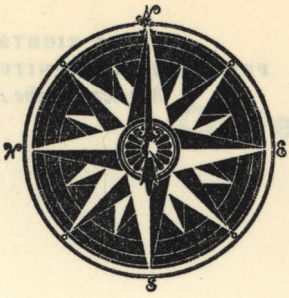
ALASKA GHOST GLACIER MYSTERY

MYSTERY OF THE AMBUSH IN INDIA

Ten feet of furred lightning landed squarely on the cage

A BIFF BREWSTER MYSTERY ADVENTURE



MYSTERY OF THE AMBUSH IN INDIA

By ANDY ADAMS

NEW YORK

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Mystery of the Ambush in India

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MYSTERY OF THE AMBUSH IN INDIA

MYSTERY OF THE AMBUSH IN INDIA

1

A Mysterious Message

IT WAS sunset along the Calcutta waterfront. The reflection of the vivid tropical sky turned the murky water of the Hooghly River into a rippling rainbow. The river was alive with a variety of craft, including native sailboats, side-wheel steamers that plied up and down the Hooghly between Calcutta and the Bay of Bengal, eighty miles south, as well as sturdy tugs, launches, and lighters that served the ocean-going ships moored in midstream along the strand.

Biff Brewster was standing at the bow of a big freighter, the 10,000-ton *Northern Star,* which only that afternoon had cast anchor in the Port of Calcutta. Biff was a blond-haired youth of sixteen, with broad, square shoulders and blue-gray eyes that were as keen and expressive as his strong, well-formed features. With Biff were two other boys, his companions in previous adventures.

One was Kamuka, a Brazilian boy of Biff's own size and age. They had met at the headwaters of the Amazon, where Biff had accompanied his father,

Thomas Brewster, in an adventurous search for a fabulous gold mine. Kamuka, who had spent most of his life on jungle rivers, was keenly interested in the scenes he now was viewing along the Hooghly.

The other boy was slightly younger and smaller of build, but quite as wiry and athletic as his two companions. He was Likake Mahenili, a Hawaiian youth known as "Li" to his friends. Li, a skilled diver, had helped Biff crack the riddle of a vanished sloop when they had teamed in a thrilling sea hunt off the Hawaiian shores.

Now, all three were newly arrived in India, the land of mystery. But there was no mystery as to why and how they happened to be together. That was due to a simple turn of events.

Months ago, Biff's father had gone to India to open long-neglected gold mines in some of the former princely states that had been absorbed by the Indian Republic. It had taken much longer than Mr. Brewster expected—as many of his jobs did—so he had arranged for the family to come by air to India and join him there.

Meanwhile, Biff had invited Kamuka to come from Brazil and spend his vacation in the United States. By a quick switch of plans, Biff and Kamuka had flown to San Francisco just in time to take last-minute passage on the *Northern Star,* which cost less for both than Biff's trip would have by air.

The freighter had been scheduled to call at Honolulu, so Biff had written ahead to Li, who had not only met the ship there, but had decided to come

along on his own. They had broken the monotony of the long voyage with brief stops at ports on the way, but so far, it had been more of a sightseeing tour than an adventure. They still had one more night to spend on shipboard as the *Northern Star* had reached Calcutta a day ahead of schedule.

"Tomorrow," Biff declared, "Dad will be here to meet us. By now, my mother and the twins should have reached Darjeeling, so he may be bringing them along to visit the gold fields."

"I hope that Mr. Brewster shows us the Kolar Mines at Mysore," declared Li enthusiastically. "They have shafts that go down two miles, the deepest in the world."

"Except for those in South America," put in Kamuka stoutly. "They are the world's deepest. I learned that at technical school in Brasilia."

"And I suppose they taught you that South America has the biggest mountains, too," returned Li. "Just wait until we see Mt. Everest. Those Himalayas will make your Andes look like a lot of ant hills."

"I shall wait until I see them before I judge," said Kamuka complacently. "But since you speak of ant hills, the ones we have in Brazil are bigger than anywhere else."

"You can't win, Li," laughed Biff. "Kamuka has an answer for everything."

"You're telling me?" returned Li, with a grin. "He even answers questions before I ask them."

This good-natured banter had been going on all across the Pacific. In the friendly disputes between

Kamuka and Li, Biff had been called upon to act as judge. So now he gestured toward the river, with the comment:

"Let's keep our minds on what we're watching for —the tidal bore coming up the river. I'd say it's due any moment now, the way those boats are getting ready for it.

Tugs and side-wheelers were bracing to buck the incoming tide, while the native boats were hoisting colorful sails and poising in midstream, ready to take off up the river. Biff had his movie camera with him and he began taking color pictures of the scene, including activity along the shore, where tiny craft were hastily shoving off.

"They'll have to clear those piers," Biff commented, "or they may be smashed like eggshells when the bore hits."

The other boys nodded as they scanned the deepening purple of the river. But even their keen eyes failed to detect a motion on the darkened steps of an old pier. There, a slim, furtive figure was crouched close to the water, looking out toward mid-channel.

Carefully, the huddled watcher fingered a watertight packet attached to a thin chain around his neck; then, satisfied that it was safe, he slid his sleek, brown form into the river and began swimming smoothly, swiftly toward the *Northern Star*. He might have been mistaken for a snout-nosed crocodile from the delta of the Hooghly, or a floating log swirling in the eddies of the changing tide. But no one noticed him, least of all the boys high on the big freighter's bow,

for their attention now was fully gripped by what was happening downstream.

Distant whistles blared; their deep-throated signal was relayed by other ships closer by. Tugs added shrill blasts as a great crest of water came rushing upstream, churning the muddy Hooghly into a whitish foam. Tiny boats were tossed like match boxes by the six-foot wave that swept from shore to shore. Launches rocked, tugs jounced, and the sailing craft caught the stiff wind that accompanied the tidal bore, letting its billows carry them along.

While Biff and his companions were watching the wave surge toward them, the sleek, brown swimmer reached the bow of the *Northern Star*. If the arriving wall of water didn't overwhelm him, it seemed sure to crush him against the side of the big ship. But as it was almost upon him, his quick hands came up and grabbed the freighter's anchor chain. An instant later, he was out of the water and while scrambling upward like a monkey the white foam churned just beneath him.

Clinging there, he waited while the freighter strained at its moorings, because of the sudden lift. Then, satisfied that the chain would not swing him against the ship, he continued his climb, his dripping figure scarcely visible.

On the deck above, the boys had gone to the starboard side, where Biff was taking pictures of the boats that were riding upstream. None of them noticed the head and shoulders that appeared over the port rail. A sleek figure followed, slid behind a row of crates, and

worked along to a companionway. There it darted swiftly up the steps to the cabin deck above.

Biff had been following the bore with his camera, until it faded, tiny sailing ships and all, beneath the towering bulk of the Howrah Bridge, which spanned the quarter-mile width of the Hooghly River.

"Well, what did you think of it?" Biff asked.

"We have bigger bores on the Amazon," replied Kamuka nonchalantly. "This was only six feet. Ours are as high as sixteen."

"And the way those sailboats took off was nothing," put in Li. "Not compared with the way we ride the rollers with our surfboards at Waikiki."

"It's nice to hear you fellows agree on something," laughed Biff. As he spoke, a gong sounded from amidships. "And there is something else you both like, the first call to dinner. Wait while I put my camera in the cabin; then I'll join you."

Biff had left the door of his cabin unlocked. When he opened the door, he was conscious of a slight stir within. Biff looked toward the porthole that served as a window. Momentarily, it blacked out, then showed plainly against the dimming sunset, as though a figure had squirmed through. Biff stepped out, closing the door, and called down to Li and Kamuka:

"Take a look over the port side and see if someone is hanging on outside my cabin!"

A figure had been hanging on, but no longer. Pushing off from the side of the ship, it straightened in mid-air and plummeted down the side of the freighter, punching the water with scarcely a splash. By the

time Li and Kamuka looked over the rail and Biff was gazing from the porthole of the cabin, the lithe brown swimmer was heading shoreward, unseen on the now darkened surface of the river.

The cabin itself was empty. Of that, Biff felt sure as he turned on the light, until a familiar voice spoke almost at his elbow.

"Listen carefully, Biff," the voice announced. "I have something important to tell you—"

The effect was electric on Biff. "It's Dad's voice!" he exclaimed. By then, the door of the cabin had opened again, and Li and Kamuka were staring in, both bewildered as the voice continued:

"I cannot meet you as I planned, so follow these instructions exactly. Tomorrow morning, at ten o'clock, be at the New India Bazaar in Calcutta—"

At this, Li exclaimed excitedly, "It's Mr. Brewster's voice!" and Kamuka added, "But where is he? I don't see him?" Then, Biff was pointing, showing them the answer. The voice was coming from a tape recorder that was on a table in the corner, and was connected with a lamp socket in the cabin wall.

"And there you will receive another message," Mr. Brewster's voice declared. "Follow it exactly, and you will meet a man we both can trust. He will have more to tell you, so obey his orders to the letter, as if they came from me."

The tape ran on silently from that point. Biff stopped the recorder as Li asked, in a puzzled tone, "Is this a joke, Biff?" Kamuka, his eyes wide, was silently asking the same question, but Biff shook his head.

"Far from it," said Biff. "I never heard this tape before, but it's Dad's voice, as you both know. He has a recorder just like mine; in fact, I brought this one along because Dad told me that if he had a special message, he would put it on tape for me—just as he has!"

With that, Biff strode to the porthole and looked out over the black river, toward the thousands of lights that were now gleaming from the vastness of Calcutta, largest city in India, and the second greatest metropolis of what had once been the British Empire.

"But who brought the message?" queried Li.

"And why?" added Kamuka.

"Those questions," returned Biff, "will be answered tomorrow, at the New India Bazaar!"

The Boy and the Basket

THE last call for dinner interrupted any further comments on the mysterious message. Tonight was a big event, for the chief steward of the *Northern Star* had gone the limit to please the three youthful passengers on the freighter. The meal consisted of specialties in Brazilian, Hawaiian, and American dishes, with little speeches in between.

But the boys found it difficult to share the spirit of the other passengers and ship's officers, who were doing their best to entertain them on this last evening together. Biff was sure that morning would bring some confirmation of his father's message, while Li and Kamuka were wondering whether or not he had sufficient reason to be that confident.

Early the next morning, the three boys were up and on deck when a mail boat came to the *Northern Star*. A uniformed Hindu handed a telegram to Captain Peterson, the skipper of the freighter, who passed it on to Biff with the comment:

"This is for you rather than for me."

Li and Kamuka were peering over Biff's shoulders as he read the message aloud:

"NOTIFY BIFF BREWSTER HIS FATHER CANNOT MEET HIM IN CALCUTTA. HE AND FRIENDS ARE TO PICK UP PLANE RESERVATIONS FOR DARJEELING AND JOIN HIS FAMILY THERE."

The message was signed by the New Delhi representative of the Ajax Mining Company, for which Biff's father worked. Captain Peterson told the boys to let him know if they had any trouble finding their plane reservations at the Grand Hotel, where the bus left for the Calcutta Airport at Dum Dum. Biff and his two companions said good-by and packed themselves ashore.

They took a taxicab past the Maidan, the huge park where hundreds of Hindus were asleep on the grassy expanse. Still more were sprawled along the sidewalk of Chowringhi Road, which brought them to the Grand Hotel. There, they found that plane reservations had been made for Darjeeling, but instead of picking them up immediately, Biff inquired the way to the New India Bazaar and found that it was a short rickshaw ride from the hotel.

Soon the boys were riding swiftly through the native quarter of Calcutta, in a two-wheeled, man-hauled carriage that followed narrow streets flanked by rows of old tenement houses and other crude structures filled with the city's teeming population.

At the New India Bazaar, they found rows of

small shops surrounding a busy square where shoppers in Hindu attire carefully side-stepped a sacred cow that was sprawled complacently on the sidewalk. Barkers were babbling in Hindustani, trying to attract trade and one youth, attired in shorts and loose white jacket, was drumming up business by beating the ends of a wooden keg, tom-tom style, drawing a crowd along with him.

The Indian boy looked tall because he was thin, even to his smiling face. He eyed Biff and the other boys closely as he passed them, giving the drum a few quick, extra beats as an invitation to come along. Biff turned to his companions and ran his hand through his shock of blond hair.

"Dad must have given his friend a good description of me," Biff told the others, "so I am sure to be spotted soon. The more we circulate, the easier it will be to find me, so we may as well see where this drummer boy is leading us."

They wound up at an open corner where some buildings had been demolished to make way for one of the wide new streets that were being cut through the city's congested areas. Temporarily, at least, it had been turned into an outdoor theater, for a man in baggy white clothes and a huge turban was beckoning the crowd his way as he announced:

"I, Jinnah Jad, greatest *jadoo wallah* in Bengal. I make *jadoo* with duck. You see."

By "jadoo" Jinnah Jad meant "magic," and the term "wallah" signified that he performed it. The jadoo wallah filled a small tub with water from a big

jar, then placed a miniature imitation duck in the tiny pond thus formed. As Jinnah Jad made mystic passes over the toy duck, it dived into the water, only to come popping up again at his command.

As the boys moved closer with the interested crowd, Jinnah Jad gestured them into a semicircle and announced:

"I show you magic with mango. First I make tent where it can grow—"

As he spoke, he set three sticks in the ground so they formed a tripod about four feet high. He took a cloth from a big heap and wrapped it around the sticks, making a little tepee. He held up a mango seed, about the size of a large pear, then pushed it in through the opening of the tent, as though planting it.

Soon Jinnah Jad pulled away the cloth and showed a little sprout instead of just a seed. He formed the tent again, using a larger cloth. He piped a tune on a hollow gourd that he used as a flute and pulled away the cloth. There, spreading out from the tent, was a small mango tree, with fruit on its branches!

As the crowd buzzed its admiration, Jinnah Jad turned to the slender boy with the drum and said, "Chandra, you bring me rupees, so I make more jadoo." The boy promptly picked up a wooden bowl and started through the crowd, taking up a collection, nudging people with the bowl and gesturing to their pockets whenever they hesitated at contributing a few coins.

Biff, meanwhile, was speaking in a low voice to his companions. "Let's spread out, so you two can watch

to see if anyone is watching me," he suggested. "Then no one will know that we are together." To that, Li and Kamuka agreed. As they moved away, they each passed Chandra and added coins to the collection at the Hindu boy's urging. Then Chandra reached Biff and asked politely, "You have rupees, maybe, sahib?"

Biff pulled two rupee notes from his pocket and dropped them in the bowl. Chandra bowed and brushed past, taking the bowl to Jinnah Jad, who picked out the rupee notes and glowered his dissatisfaction at the rest. Two men were passing by, carrying a heavy basket that dangled by its handles from a long pole. Jinnah Jad told them to set down their burden and remove the bundles that it contained. Then:

"This boy is good for nothing," declared Jinnah Jad, indicating Chandra. "So I make him go for good. You watch."

Before Chandra could dart away, Jinnah Jad grabbed him and thrust him into the basket, which was roundish and bulging at the sides. Jinnah Jad threw a cloth over the boy's head and shoulders and suddenly, Chandra's form collapsed beneath it. Triumphantly, Jinnah Jad jumped into the basket and trampled the cloth there.

Chandra had vanished from the basket, and to prove it, Jinnah Jad not only stamped his feet all around, he squatted down in the basket, filling it with his fat form, while he clucked like a happy hen seated on a nest. Then, emerging from the basket, Jinnah Jad snatched up a long sword, shouting, "I show you boy is really gone!" With that, he stabbed the sword

through one side of the basket and out the other side.

While the crowd gasped, Jinnah Jad repeated the thrust again and again, one direction, then another. The jadoo wallah had worked himself into a frenzy when the men who owned the basket stopped him and babbled in a native dialect.

"They know the boy is gone," translated Jinnah Jad, for the benefit of the crowd. "They do not want me to spoil their basket." He waved to the basket and told the two bearers, "All right, take it."

Eagerly, the two natives piled their bundles into the basket, thrust the pole through its handles and hoisted it on their shoulders. By then, Jinnah Jad was in the midst of another miracle. He was pouring rice from a bowl into a square teakwood box that had a glass front, while he stated:

"One time, in India, there was great famine, with people everywhere needing rice. So a great yogi in the Himalayas fill a box with rice like this—"

The throng was hushed, for Calcutta itself had suffered from great famines, even in comparatively recent years.

"So by magic, he sent rice everywhere, to everybody!" Jinnah Jad gave the box a flip. Instantly, the rice was gone from behind the glass and he was opening the box wide, showing it to be totally empty. "Yes, to everybody! To you—to you—to you." Jinnah Jad was jabbing his finger from person to person. "So look in your pockets and find it! You, sahib—you, babu—find rice!"

People were bringing fistfuls of rice from their

pockets. Biff smiled, thinking these were friends of the jadoo wallah, until he saw total astonishment on faces close by. Those included Li's, for a dozen feet away, the Hawaiian youth was bringing out two handfuls of the tiny grains from each coat pocket. Still skeptical, Biff thrust his hands into his own pockets and brought them out—containing rice!

The deeper he dug, the more he found. Biff was almost ready to accept the jadoo of Jinnah Jad as real indeed, when he brought out something else, a crinkly wad of paper, with more rice inside it. Puzzled, Biff pulled it open and found it to be a penciled note that stated:

Follow men who go with basket. Go alone. Tell no one where you go. Important.

None of the other spectators had found a note like that, for they were simply staring at the rice, while Jinnah Jad moved through the crowd, taking up a new collection in person. Biff looked for the basket bearers and saw them starting slowly away, as if they had waited just long enough for Biff to find the note.

So Biff started after them, working his way through the crowd so that he went past Li. Quickly, Biff muttered:

"Don't look now. Just find Kamuka and wait for me here. I'll be back—soon."

The Rajah's Ruby

BY THE time the basket carriers had turned a few corners, Biff was not so sure that he would rejoin his companions as soon as he expected. The lazily moving pair suddenly stepped up their pace and the narrow, poorly paved streets looked so much alike that Biff had no idea where they were leading him.

The streets were flanked by *chawls* or native houses that were scarcely more than hovels. From the suspicious glances that Biff received, and from the way the buildings encroached upon the narrow alleys, he felt as though a whole sea of humanity was closing in upon him. He realized that he would need a compass to find his way back. There was no telling by the sun, which was out of sight even over the low roofs, although the day was becoming so hot that Biff wished he were back in a rickshaw instead of footing it through these dismal, dirty streets.

Then they reached a better section, where the buildings were higher, with occasional shop fronts.

There, the basket bearers slackened pace and turned into a passage beneath an archway that bore the sign:

D. CHAND & BROS.
Import—Export
WAREHOUSE

Biff followed cautiously and saw the two men cross a little courtyard and continue through another archway well beyond. There they disappeared from view but only long enough to set down the basket, because one of them returned to the inner arch and closed a big metal gate behind him. He then went to rejoin his companion.

By then, Biff was moving into the courtyard himself. He edged over to one side and gained a look through the inner arch. Beyond the closed gate he saw what appeared to be a large storeroom, for there were many crates, boxes, and other bulky objects stacked there. From his angle, Biff could see nothing of the two men, so he moved cautiously toward the inner arch, hoping to get a closer and more direct view.

At that moment, a clang sounded behind him, and Biff turned to see that another gate had closed in the outer arch. A tall man in baggy white clothes had stepped in from the street and was now locking the gate behind him. Biff was trapped in the open space between the archways. He looked quickly for an outlet, and saw one on the other side of the courtyard, in the form of an open doorway.

Biff hurried in that direction, only to stop short as a man appeared in the doorway to meet him with a polite, welcoming bow. The man was dressed in European clothes, but his broad, bland face, with fixed smile and bushy eyebrows above his large-rimmed glasses, was definitely Asiatic. So was his cool, even-toned pronouncement:

"I am Diwan Chand. I have been expecting you. Come in."

Then, as Biff hesitated, glancing back at the white-garbed Hindu, who was coming from the outer gate, Diwan Chand added a further introduction:

"This is Nathu, my special watchman. I thought it best to have him lock the gate, so we cannot be disturbed. He will wait here until we return."

Chand said nothing about the pair who had gone through the inner archway with the basket. Biff followed the bland merchant through a room equipped with a long row of vacant desks, like an old-fashioned counting house.

"Our clerks work here," explained Chand, "but they have all gone out to lunch, so no one will know of your visit."

Whether that was good or bad, Biff wasn't sure. He felt a nervous tingling that seemed an instinctive warning of some close danger; yet it might be that all these precautions were for his benefit.

This seemed doubly so when they reached Chand's quiet private office at the rear of the long counting room. There, the merchant closed the door, gestured Biff to a chair, and opened a small safe that was cun-

ningly concealed in the elaborately carved woodwork of the wall.

"You received your father's message," commented Mr. Chand, "and now I have something for you to take to him. This."

Biff gasped at the object Mr. Chand placed on the table before him. There, in a small case lined with white velvet, gleamed the largest and most magnificent gem that Biff had ever seen. It was a blood-red ruby, with a touch of purple that gave it a glow like living fire, even in the subdued light of the office. In his study of mineralogy, Biff had viewed many fine stones, but never one that even approached this ruby.

"A *padmaraga*," Mr. Chand said. "A true Brahmin ruby, not to be confused with those of lesser caste. Whoever carries such a gem as this one can live in perfect safety in the midst of many enemies, totally without fear."

At first, Biff thought that Mr. Chand was simply repeating some Hindu legend concerning rubies, but he soon saw that the merchant's steady smile had become very serious.

"For this I can vouch," Mr. Chand continued. "The Light of the Lama, as this ruby is known, brought good fortune to the descendants of the rajah who originally owned it. While I have been its custodian, I, too, have prospered. There has been no trouble here, despite riots and disturbances in other parts of Calcutta, in fact, throughout India."

Mr. Chand picked up the squarish jewel case and started to place it in a chamois bag, as he added:

"And now good fortune goes with you. They say that even the power of invisibility is granted to those who hold this gem. Perhaps that is why danger has passed me by."

"But in that case," Biff asked frankly, "why are you giving it to me? Shouldn't you keep it for yourself?"

"It is my duty to pass it along," replied Mr. Chand solemnly, "and besides, I have noticed that the Light is losing some of its fire, which is a bad sign. See for yourself!"

He moved the ruby closer to Biff, who saw now that the gem was in a simple golden setting; but more important, just as Mr. Chand said, its sparkle had dwindled. Then, as Biff himself held the jewel, its wine-red depth kindled with new flame, so suddenly that Biff caught his breath.

"A good sign!" exclaimed Mr. Chand, closing the little case and thrusting it into the bag. "That proves it is in the hands where it belongs!" He pressed it into Biff's hands as he spoke. "So guard it well"—he paused and his fixed smile became whimsical for once —"or I should say, it will guard you well. We have just seen proof of that."

Evidently, Mr. Chand referred to the ruby's sudden glow, which was quite puzzling to Biff. But something else puzzled him still more.

"Why must I take this ruby to my father?"

"He will tell you when you see him," replied Mr. Chand. "The less I say, the better, now that I no longer have the ruby to protect me."

"And where will I find my father now?"

"In New Delhi. Go there, but do not contact his company except to ask for him by telephone. If he is not there, go to the United States Embassy, but be careful even then, as spies are watching everywhere. Trust only your father's voice as you did when you received the taped message that I sent you."

Biff nodded, recognizing the wisdom of all that. Then, thoughtfully, he remarked:

"In that message, my father said I would meet a man that he and I could both trust. I am sure he meant you, Mr. Chand."

If the merchant had beamed at the compliment, Biff might have been suspicious, for he still felt the odd sensation of some impending danger. But Mr. Chand was modest.

"You can trust me," he said simply, "but your father meant another man, Barma Shah. He was the contact who brought us together. I had hoped that he would be here to meet you and go with you now, but he is probably being watched."

"By the same spies you mentioned, Mr. Chand?" Bibb inquired.

"Yes. Barma Shah told me he would stay away if danger threatened here. That was a month ago and shortly afterward, new riots broke out in Calcutta. Some were rather close by, the nearest that they have been. Naturally, Barma Shah did not come that day. He has stayed away since—and wisely—so I sent word to you myself, as was arranged for such a situation."

Above Mr. Chand's quiet voice, Biff thought he heard a rising murmur, much like the approach of the tidal bore along the Hooghly. Whether or not it was his imagination, he felt more closed in than ever.

"The day of the riots," Mr. Chand went on, "I looked at the Light of the Lama and saw it had clouded. I was afraid, not for myself, but for Barma Shah. I was glad when he did not come here—"

The murmur was louder now, no longer like wave beats, but more a human babble, with occasional muffled shouts. Mr. Chand heard them, too, for he raised his hand and exclaimed: "Listen!" Timed to the action came a sudden pounding at the office door and the excited voice of Nathu, the watchman:

"Master! There is danger! Another riot has started, outside our very gate!"

As Chand unlocked the office door and opened it, the babble rose to a bedlam of howls, shrieks, and the clang of metal as the mob battered at the big gate. At Chand's mention of the ruby, Biff had thrust his hand into his pocket to see if he still had the chamois bag that he had placed there. It was safe, and as Biff clenched it tensely, his palm seemed to burn as though the gem were actually glowing through its wrappings.

There was a huge crash as the metal gate collapsed and now, through the barred windows of the counting room, Biff could see the milling figures of the native rioters as they flooded the courtyard, swinging clubs, slashing with knives, and hurling rocks at one another. Some of those missiles smashed the glass in the barred windows, adding to the crowd's glee, for

they were eager to destroy property along with lives.

Mr. Chand showed surprising speed as he whisked Biff back into the little office and through a door in the opposite wall, at the same time saying excitedly, "Go through the *godown!* It is your only way!"

Biff thought "godown" meant some steps, but instead, Mr. Chand was referring to the storeroom. As Biff started off among the crates, there was another clang from the courtyard, where the rioters were smashing at the inner gate leading into the storage room itself.

"Not that way!" called Mr. Chand. "At the back, you will find another *darwaza*—another gate! Turn left on the back street until you reach the *chowk*—the market place! You will be safe there."

Mr. Chand turned back into his office to help Nathu try to stem the attack, and Biff shoved his way among the crates, clambering over boxes, until he reached the rear exit that Mr. Chand had mentioned, but too late. Already, the back street teemed with rioters. Leering faces turned Biff's way, and eager fingers pointed at him through the bars of the rear gate.

Then hands were bashing the gate itself as others threw stones through the grillwork. Biff dodged back among the crates, realizing hopelessly that he was caught between two fires. A great crash told that the gate from the courtyard had given way; and an echoing clang from the other direction signified that the rear gate had met the same fate.

What Biff's own fate would be, the next few mo-

ments would tell. Grimly, he found himself gripping the chamois bag in his pocket, wondering if the Light of the Lama could save him now. As if in answer, something plucked his shoulder and Biff turned quickly, bringing both fists up to fight off the first of a hundred enemies.

Instead, he found himself looking into the face of Chandra, the Indian boy who had vanished from the basket back at the New India Bazaar. Above the babble of the rioters came Chandra's words:

"Quick! Come with me—this way!"

IV

Biff Vanishes

ESCAPE from the frenzied mob seemed impossible, but at least Chandra was making a try as he pushed Biff toward a deep corner of the big storeroom, the only direction in which the invaders had not yet spread. But there was no door, no outlet, nothing except a solid stone wall beyond the last lot of crates.

Those offered no good hiding place, because the rioters already were overturning or yanking open chests and boxes which blocked them, while they kept up an excited shout, "*Farangi! Farangi!*"

That was one word that Biff knew. It meant "European"—which in his case could be translated as "American"—and it signified that they were definitely after Biff, though probably they would attack any Farangi that they encountered. And now, Biff and Chandra were practically in the corner, with no way to turn, except one, which looked like the worst trap of all.

Just ahead stood a tall, rather bulky cabinet shaped in the form of a pagoda, with half a dozen sides and a

pair of front doors that were partly open. Quickly, Chandra thrust Biff inside and pushed him to the back, saying, "In there—keep quiet—do not move!" Then he pressed an inner door shut, and Biff found himself alone in pitch darkness, clamped in a space so tight that Chandra's admonition not to move was quite unnecessary.

Chandra was gone by then, dodging off among the crates, perhaps to save his own sleek hide at the expense of Biff's. For Biff, realizing now that he was really boxed, was beginning to regret that he had trusted the Indian youth so completely. Chandra, a native himself, probably had friends among the mob. Maybe he had even told them that he would lure Biff here.

Until now, Biff had had a chance either for fight or flight. Those were both gone, and if he didn't suffocate in this bandbox, he would probably be yanked out and torn apart before he could even make a move. He was so tightly jammed, he couldn't even reach into his pocket and find the ruby, which he felt was the real cause of his misfortune, despite the soft talk Diwan Chand had given him.

Even now, Biff heard voices: "Farangi—we find him—look there . . ." And he could hear crates being turned over close by. Next, the shouters were clambering in and out of the cabinet itself, for Biff could feel it shake and the hoarse, snarly voices were almost at his elbow. They were even pulling the pagoda out from the wall, for its platform was set on wheels; and they were literally spinning it about, with Biff still

inside it, yet for some reason, they passed by him in the blackness.

More shouts, louder crashes were suddenly punctuated by pistol shots, leading to a last round of tumult that soon died. Biff heard receding footsteps; then came a deadly silence, which was even worse. Biff felt totally helpless and abandoned, unable to move, afraid even to call for help. He was drenched in perspiration, and why he hadn't suffocated or been found he couldn't understand, until a sharp click interrupted his numbed thoughts.

Biff lurched forward, found the front doors and stepped shakily from the pagoda cabinet to find one person in the dim light of the warehouse waiting, grinning, to receive him. That was Chandra.

Briefly, the Indian boy explained things.

"They took a good look for you, all right," he said. "Some of them did, anyway, while the rest kept fighting each other. They looked a lot, but they didn't find you—or me."

"But where did you go, Chandra?"

"Back in basket that brought me here," replied Chandra, widening his grin. He reached past a crate, pulled out the basket, squatted in it and suddenly squirmed from sight, as if the basket were bottomless. Biff looked in and was amazed to see nothing except a heap of old cloth.

Then, the heap stirred, and Chandra twisted into view from the basket's bulging sides where he had artfully coiled his thin, agile body.

"So that's how you vanished!" exclaimed Biff.

"Why, you were still in the basket when the two men took it away!"

"How else could I get here so quick?" retorted Chandra. "They are friends of Jinnah Jad, who show up with basket at the right time. This godown is where Jinnah Jad keeps all his tricks, like the new pagoda he built to make people vanish. So I put you there."

"And I was thinking—"

Biff cut himself short, but Chandra picked him up.

"You think maybe the big ruby made you invisible," declared Chandra, "as it is supposed to do. But no, it was the pagoda trick. It hid you, the basket hid me."

Biff was cooler now, and he felt an actual shudder as he looked around at the wreckage and saw some silent human figures lying near the gate to the courtyard. Otherwise, the warehouse was deserted, except for Biff and Chandra.

"But where did they all go, Chandra?" Biff asked.

"You heard shooting?" returned Chandra. "That was the police. They came to help Diwan Chand. Lucky they didn't use tear gas, which they do a lot. We would have gotten it, too."

Chandra was looking around at the broken boxes. He saw one that interested him and beckoned Biff that way.

"We must get out before police come back and ask us to be witnesses," declared Chandra. "But the people who are after the ruby will be watching for you. So you must wear other clothes—like these."

Chandra was picking some native garments from those that had been dumped from an overturned chest. Studying Biff, Chandra noted the deep tan that Biff had acquired during his long voyage on the *Northern Star*.

"Your face is dark enough," decided Chandra, "but your light hair will have to be hidden. So we will make you into a Sikh. A Sikh always wears a turban. That will fool everyone."

Soon, Biff was attired in a costume that made him feel top-heavy. It consisted of shorts, shirt, and jacket, and a huge turban, which completely covered Biff's ears as well as his head, after Chandra helped him wrap it. They bundled up Biff's clothes along with some other garments and went out by the rear gate.

It was fortunate that both were in native garb, because Biff could sense that eyes were watching them as they followed the street to the market place. Chandra knew it too, for he said, "Don't look around. They will suspect us if you do."

There were natives in the market place, gathered in little clusters, discussing the recent riot. They glanced at the boys as they passed, but that was all. Chandra gave a pleased chuckle, then added cautiously, "It looks good now, but still we play it safe. We go the long way, past the *thana*."

By *thana*, Chandra meant police headquarters, a place that suspicious characters would avoid. After passing it, the boys were satisfied that they were not being followed, so they doubled back to the New India Bazaar, where they saw Li and Kamuka study-

ing the passersby from the doorway of a sporting goods shop.

It was Biff's move now. He eased up to Li, tapped him on the shoulder, and said, "Salaam, Sahib." Li turned and blinked puzzled at the face beneath the turban until Biff could no longer restrain a grin.

"Biff!" exclaimed Li. "But where—and why—"

"We can't talk here," interposed Biff. "Meet me around the corner and bring Kamuka."

Chandra was with Biff when the other boys arrived. After introducing the Indian youth, Biff said:

"I must go to New Delhi. If Chandra can go with me, it is up to him to decide who can accompany us."

"I can go," Chandra assured him, "and Kamuka, too. But not Li." He turned to the Hawaiian youth. "Too many people saw you with Biff while you were watching Jinnah Jad make jadoo. You might be recognized, one because of the other."

Before Li could even show the disappointment that he felt, Biff softened the situation.

"Somebody will have to go up to Darjeeling," he reminded his friend, "to tell the family where I've gone. Canceling those extra plane reservations and handling our luggage is a tough job, too. It looks like you're elected, Li."

Li not only was elected; he did his job well. He went to the Grand Hotel and returned by taxi, rejoining the group at a restaurant that Chandra had specified. Li had canceled the air reservations without difficulty; he had brought hiking packs for Biff and

Kamuka, and he had arranged for shipment of the excess baggage.

After a substantial meal, Li returned to the hotel by cab, to catch the Darjeeling plane. The other boys boarded a big bus for Howrah, across the river. Biff and Kamuka looked down from the tremendous cantilever span and viewed the muddy Hooghly, hoping to spot the *Northern Star* moored in the dim distance. They were talking about it—in English, unfortunately—when Chandra hissed for silence.

They realized then that they were an odd group as it was—too odd to be using English as a common language. Biff, whose features didn't properly match his Sikh's costume; Kamuka, who might have come from an upcountry tribe, but was wearing European clothes; Chandra, who with his *dhoti* and jacket, looked like a jadoo wallah's boy, which was exactly what he was, and therefore the most outlandish of the trio.

In short, they were attracting too much attention. Biff and Kamuka promptly subsided. Biff, particularly, felt that he should show some dignity, so he did, by looking squarely at the other passengers, until he caught the eye of a distinguished-looking man across the aisle.

The man had a large beard and a huge turban, which marked him as a Sikh, and a genuine one. He was studying Biff with sharp eyes that continued their piercing probe until the bus reached Howrah Station. Then, as they were stepping from the bus, the bearded

Sikh suddenly spoke to Biff in what was their own common language, except that Biff couldn't understand a word of it.

All that saved Biff was a surge of the crowd, with people pushing one way, then another, cutting him off from the bearded Sikh. Next, Biff was on the outskirts of the milling throng, and Chandra was yanking him away, along with Kamuka.

"Thanks, Chandra!" Biff gasped. "If you hadn't dragged me out of that jam, the Sikh would have known I was a fake—"

"That wasn't why!" returned Chandra. "That wouldn't have bothered us. Maybe you're a fake, but he's a bigger one. I saw his beard close enough to know."

Biff looked back and saw that Chandra was right. Caught in the crowd, the man with the big turban wasn't trying to follow the three boys; in fact, he couldn't even see them. The reason was that his false beard had been pulled up over his eyes, and he was madly trying to straighten it.

Hand in his pocket, Biff was gripping the packet that he had transferred from his own clothes, wondering if the Light of the Lama again had saved him from an enemy!

v

Danger at Dawn

RIGHT then, Biff's one hope was that he and his two companions could lose themselves in another and bigger crowd and thus dodge the disguised stranger who was so intent upon following them.

They couldn't have chosen a better place than the Howrah Station. It seemed five times bigger than any other railway station Biff had ever seen, and it contained ten times as many people. The afternoon had reached its peak of stifling heat, so they had come in here and sprawled over the acres of cool marble floors in preference to the Calcutta sidewalks.

The boys had to step around prostrate bodies or clamber over them, as did hundreds of other travelers who were thronging the great depot. Practically all of those travelers were natives, and many of them were carrying huge bundles that contained most of their worldly possessions.

Chandra explained that many of Calcutta's three million citizens were constantly on the move, due to lack of food or jobs; but that as fast as they left town,

others poured in to replace them. He added that the population was still shifting between India and Pakistan, which accounted for more travel, particularly since the East Pakistan border was so near Calcutta. He also mentioned that many were pilgrims bound for Benares and other places holy to Hindu cults.

While the boys picked their way through the immense station, Chandra pointed out examples of each group. He also called attention to occasional Europeans and well-dressed Indians, including Hindus of high caste.

"Those few," declared Chandra, "go first- or second-class. Always, some talk English and ask too much about everybody's business. I know, because I have gone second-class with Jinnah Jad. So we will go third-class and talk just to each other."

That satisfied Biff and Kamuka. It wasn't a matter of saving money, for they had pooled their cash and had more than enough to travel in luxury, with Chandra included. But getting to New Delhi unnoticed was essential, and the train trip, which required more than twenty-four hours, was the sort that promised complications, so the more they avoided, the better.

Chandra had a bright idea on that score, too. Biff gave him enough money to buy three third-class tickets, but when Chandra rejoined the other boys, he returned half the cash.

"I only buy tickets halfway," he stated, "so nobody will know we are going to New Delhi. They will think maybe we are going to Benares or Allahabad,

but instead we will go on to a little village where my uncle lives and start again from there."

"You're the boss of this expedition, Chandra," Biff assured him. "Anything that will cover our trail is a good idea."

Breaking the trip also seemed a good idea when Biff saw the accommodations that the third-class carriages offered. Biff had been afraid that he might be noticed on the station platform, the way he had been on the bus, but that worry soon was over. The platform was thicker with milling humanity than the station itself. People would have been pushed onto the track, if the train hadn't been there to receive them.

Many were crowding into first- and second-class compartments, only to be pushed out and ordered back to where they belonged, in third class. Amid the commotion, Chandra found one third-class compartment that looked full, but wasn't, because the occupants had simply spread their luggage in a haphazard way. Chandra began piling them together like so many bundles of wash, until he had made room for all three boys, including their own luggage.

The seats in the compartment were little better than benches, but Biff gladly drew himself into the deepest and most uncomfortable corner, rather than be observed too closely when members of the train crew closed the doors, for some of them were genuine Sikhs who might have seen through his thin disguise.

The platforms were still crowded when the train pulled out—as many people had come to the station

simply to see the others off. Then the train was rolling into the open country, what little Biff could see of it. The rattle of wheels mixed with swirls of dust and blended with the smell of garlic and spices, for everyone was bringing out native food, bowls of rice, bananas, and other fruit. Biff's appetite was suddenly roused.

"Think of all that rice Jinnah Jad wasted," Biff said to Kamuka, "when he did that trick! I could eat some of it now."

"He didn't waste it," reminded Kamuka. "He put it in our pockets, remember? We should have kept it."

"Say, that was a neat trick." Biff turned to Chandra. "How did Jinnah Jad work that part of it? Or don't you know?"

Chandra grinned broadly.

"That is one trick I do know," he declared. "Remember when I went through the crowd, tapping people's pockets, asking for rupees, like this?" He tapped Biff's pocket, then Kamuka's, and they both nodded. "While I do that," Chandra went on, "I use my other hand to put rice in other pockets. So later, the people find it there."

"So that was it!" Almost instinctively, Biff thrust his hand in his other pocket, then brought it out in amazement, with a pair of candy bars. Kamuka, reaching into his own pocket, found himself staring at a handful of loose peanuts.

"You must have bought these when you went for the tickets," said Biff to Chandra, "and then you slipped them into our pockets while you were telling

us how you did it! Candy for me—peanuts for Kamuka—"

"And now you have peanuts, too," put in Chandra, "in the pocket where you keep the big ruby."

Again Chandra was right, and Biff's amazement at the Indian boy's skill was complete. They ate their chocolate bars and peanuts along with some fruit that Chandra had also brought them. Then, when the other passengers were no longer noticing them, Chandra remarked:

"Remember how the big man with the fake beard got tangled in the crowd, when we were leaving the bus?"

Biff and Kamuka nodded.

"I do that too," declared Chandra proudly. "I push one person like this"—he nudged Biff forward—"and another like that"—he gave Kamuka a backward push—"and pretty soon all are in each other's way."

Biff smiled at that, too; then he turned solemn.

"We've been watched," he declared, "and that's for sure. So let's be still more careful from now on."

At various stops, the train disgorged many passengers who filled up water jars that they had brought along and returned to the train before it started. Biff and Kamuka let Chandra handle that job for their party, rather than show themselves on station platforms.

Occasionally, though, Kamuka waved from the compartment window to fruit sellers who also supplied milk and soft drinks. At such stops, first- and

second-class passengers went ahead to the dining car or had attendants bring choice dishes to their compartments; but third-class travelers didn't rate such service.

It was turning dark when the train reached the great coal fields in western Bengal. That part of the trip interested Biff most, because of the mining activity. But there was little to be seen, and soon, despite the rattle and jouncing of the train and the discomfort of the stuffy corner, Biff began dozing off.

Once, Chandra nudged him and whispered, "Watch your turban! Keep it on straight!" and Biff woke sufficiently to realize that he had one ear out of the cumbersome headgear. He worked it into place, saw Chandra nod approval, and then went back to sleep.

Again, Chandra woke both Biff and Kamuka, who was sleeping, too, telling them, "Watch out, now! New passengers coming on board. Don't let them look at you too close."

So Biff and Kamuka kept their heads together and engaged in low conversation until the new passengers gave up looking at them and fell asleep themselves. That gave Biff and Kamuka the right to do the same. This time, Biff's sleep was sound, undisturbed by the joltings of the train or the blare of the locomotive whistle as it rushed on through the thick night.

It was a dream that wakened Biff. He imagined that he was clutching the big ruby, while hands were trying to snatch it from him. He was confronted by bearded Sikhs and as he clawed wildly at their faces, their beards came away, until he saw only one smooth

face and opened his eyes to find that the dream, in a sense, was real.

Biff was clutching the bag that contained the ruby, but his hand was deep in his jacket pocket. The hands that were clutching him were Chandra's, shaking him awake; and the smooth face, too, was Chandra's. Quickly, the Indian boy put his finger to his lips for silence.

The train was standing still. All was silent in the compartment except for the snores of other passengers. The lights looked dimmer than before, because it was no longer pitch dark outside. Faint streaks of dawn were reddening the sky beyond low-lying hills. The compartment at last seemed slightly cool.

Biff risked a whisper. "Where are we?"

"At an engine-changing station," Chandra whispered back. "Our own is farther on, but we cannot wait until then."

He gestured toward Kamuka, who was still asleep. Between them, Biff and Chandra shook Kamuka and roused him instantly. Like a team, the three boys gathered their packs and stepped carefully past the knees and over the legs of sleeping passengers. Moments later, they were on a weather-beaten platform alongside the long, silent train. A few dozen human figures were stretched on the station platform, with white sheets of cloth drawn completely over their motionless forms, like shrouds.

"Railroad workers, mostly," whispered Chandra, "waiting for the next shift. No one else gets on or off here, at least, not often."

"But why are they covered over?" asked Biff, impressed by the weird appearance of the figures.

"Because the night was cool for them," replied Chandra, "but not too cool for the insects. Soon, now, the covering over their heads will keep the sun from waking them."

The boys stole across the platform past a square-shaped station where more such figures lay asleep. Kamuka, looking back at the train, put the next query:

"But why did we get off here?"

"Too many passengers changed places in the night," replied Chandra. "I saw new faces; then later, I recognized some of the old again. If we had gotten off at a crowded station, we could easily have been followed. Here, no one else can leave the train without our seeing them."

Chandra was right. The boys had reached a road that led at an angle from the tracks. Looking back, they could see the full length of the brightly colored train, as they continued on their way. In the gathering daylight, their keen eyes would surely note any motion on the steps of any of the cars. Ahead, the road led through a grove of trees. Once there, the boys themselves would be out of sight.

There was just one spot the boys' roving eyes did not cover; that was the portion of the platform obscured by the squatty station. There, three white-shrouded shapes were rising like ghosts in the gray dawn. They dropped away their sleeping sacks, revealing limber figures clad in dark clothes that

blended with the background of the station wall, as well as the trees beyond.

One man gave an order in a native dialect and like human bloodhounds, the stealthy trio stalked off along the very road that the three boys had taken!

VI

The Cry of Death

WHEN the dawn had broadened into full daylight, the change was not too noticeable, for by now the boys were trudging along a narrow, winding road that was flanked by vivid tropical foliage and thick, overhanging tree boughs that cut off much of the sunlight.

To Kamuka, this was intriguing indeed, for it carried him back to his own jungle life in Brazil, especially when he caught the chatter of the monkeys from the higher branches. But to Chandra, who was familiar with it all, such sounds were an annoyance as he tried to explain his plans to Biff.

"This road will take us to the Grand Trunk Road," stated Chandra, "which we will follow until nightfall to reach the village of Supari, where my uncle is *patwari*—"

"Patwari?" interposed Biff. "What is that?"

"The same as *karnam* or *kulkarni* or *talati*—I have heard it called by all those names—but it means in English, the man who keeps the village accounts."

"That would be the town clerk in America." Biff

nodded. "So your uncle is an important man. Go on."

"On the Grand Trunk Road," continued Chandra, "we will look like everybody else, because all India is there. You will see *hathi, oont, ekka*—"

"Wait now, Chandra," put in Biff. "Hathis are elephants, that I know. And oonts are camels. But I never heard of ekkas. What are they?"

"Pony carts," returned Chandra seriously, "and you will also see bicycles and jeeps."

"It sounds good," decided Biff. "But what if we were being watched on the train. Do you think they will catch up with us?"

"They cannot catch up," returned Chandra, "because they have gone ahead. If they talked to ticket agent or to the man who took our tickets, they know where we should get off and will look for us there."

"When does the train reach our station?" Kamuka asked.

"Not for about an hour," calculated Chandra, "counting change of engines. Before they come back to look for us, we will be on the Grand Trunk Road."

Despite his assurance, Chandra was moving rather cautiously, but for another reason. He was looking from side to side, for they were in the jungle now and there was no telling what night creatures might still be on the prowl. Chandra knew this from occasional experience in such a setting, as any Indian boy would who had lived in a native village like Supari. But Kamuka, the boy from Brazil, recognized it instinctively, for he was jungle born and bred, though in the opposite hemisphere.

"Remember, Biff?" queried Kamuka. "The time the big jaguar jumped at you?"

"I remember," replied Biff, "because it was you who stopped it, Kamuka."

"I just helped," said Kamuka. "But this jungle reminds me of jaguars. Do they have them here?"

"They have cheetahs, leopards, and tigers. Those should be enough—and more."

"And big *sucuria*, too?"

"Yes, they have those." Biff turned to Chandra. "He means a boa constrictor. We ran into a big one up the Amazon, a snake the size of your python."

"What about *Macu?*" demanded Kamuka.

"Head hunters," translated Biff to Chandra. "He wants to know if you have them, too."

"We have something much worse," declared Chandra solemnly. "We have thugs, or stranglers, who ride on trains with us. They are after your ruby, Biff, if you still have it."

Anxiously, Biff brought the bag from his pocket, opened it and held the Light of the Lama in his palm, where it caught the glint of the sunlight and reflected it with a vivid crimson sparkle that seemed to dye Biff's entire hand. The great ruby was larger than the biggest walnut, and as Biff turned it in the light, its flattened surfaces, or facets, rivaled one another with their fiery glow.

Chandra, who had been around the gem markets of Calcutta and other Indian cities, and Kamuka, who had seen the finest of South American stones during his studies in Brazil—both were swept with awe.

"Never have I seen such fire!" exclaimed Chandra. "The red ruby, like the blue sapphire, is often beautiful in color, yet very dull."

"This one loses its sparkle sometimes," Biff declared. "And according to Mr. Chand, it's a bad sign when it does."

"It gives us a good sign now," observed Kamuka. "In South America, we have the finest of all gems, the green emerald from Colombia. They say it glows brighter than any red ruby, but now I am not so sure."

Biff smiled, as he recalled Kamuka's debates with Li while they were on the freighter voyage. For Kamuka to admit that a product of South America could be matched by those of any other continent, was a concession indeed.

"That ruby," calculated Chandra, "must be worth ten *lakhs* at least, ten times a hundred thousand rupees. But that is not why your father wants it. He needs it for some special purpose; that was why he went to New Delhi. That much I have heard Mr. Chand tell Jinnah Jad."

"So it was through Jinnah Jad," inquired Biff, "that my father's message reached me?"

"It was more through me," returned Chandra proudly. "I swam out to the ship, carrying the tape in this." He produced a watertight bag on a neck chain. "I looked for the cabin with the tape recorder. I put on the tape, the way Mr. Chand showed me. Then I heard you coming, so I went out through porthole quick, and dropped straight down."

"A neat trick," complimented Biff. "I'd like to see

you do it some time. Tell me, Chandra, did you ever meet my father?"

"Yes, I see Sahib Brewster twice, when I was there at Chand and Brothers, with Jinnah Jad."

"And did you meet his friend, Barma Shah?"

"No, never. He came only to see Mr. Chand in secret. He is what you call undercover. He stayed away on purpose, when others began to find out that the ruby was there. Like thugs I speak about."

They were trudging along the road again, and now Biff recalled that it was Chandra's mention of thugs, or stranglers, that had caused him to stop and make sure that he still had the priceless ruby safely tucked away.

"These thugs," questioned Biff, "do they want the ruby because of its value?"

"They want it because of the goddess Kali," replied Chandra. "That is why they started riot outside of Chand and Brothers. They would have strangled Mr. Chand, but they found the ruby gone—"

"So they were looking for me because I had it, and they would have killed me for it!" Biff explained.

"That is right. But thugs will strangle almost anybody if they find suitable time and place, because they believe in Kali."

Biff was putting the ruby back into its bag. Chandra paused to hand him the chain with the waterproof bag, suggesting that he put the packet in that, which Biff decided was a good idea. As they started on again, Biff urged:

"Tell us more about this Kali business, Chandra."

"People say Kali was a great goddess who killed a huge monster that wanted to destroy the world," Chandra related. "But each drop of monster blood sprang up into a new monster. So Kali taught men to strangle monsters with a special cloth called *rumal*, about this long"—Chandra spread his hands approximately a yard apart—"and after monsters were all gone, men began to strangle men in the same way, never shedding any blood. And so they do today."

"But all that was stopped a hundred years ago—"

"You mean the time when British Raj said there should be no more *thugee?* Look there"—Chandra stopped abruptly and pointed to an anthill at the side of the road—"and you see white ants. They are dangerous, like thugs, so I stamp them out." Roughly, Chandra trampled the anthill and the insects teeming around it. "But are they all stamped out? No, some have gone under—how do you say it?"

"Underground," returned Biff.

"That is it," nodded Chandra. "That is the way the thugs went. Underground. Now they have come up again."

"But why do they want the ruby for Kali?"

"Because they think that rubies are drops of demon blood that will become new demons unless Kali stops them. Your ruby would make biggest demon of all, so they want it most. So Jinnah Jad tells me."

"How many thugs do you think were on the train with us, Chandra?" Biff asked.

"There always must be three," declared Chandra. "Two to use the *rumal* while the third holds the per-

son they strangle. Always, they pick some quiet place. Often they work in many secret bands, so they have a special call, which Jinnah Jad has heard and warned me against. It goes like this—"

Stopping short, Chandra tilted his head back and gave a long, weird howl, "*Hyyyyaaaaahhhh!*" that sent shivers up Biff's spine, despite the increasing warmth of the morning. Biff pulled off his big turban and mopped his forehead.

Kamuka, too, was impressed. Never in the jungle of his own native Amazon had the Brazilian boy heard a cry as strange as that. It was a curious cross between a human shriek for help and an animal's anguished wail. In jungle or village, it would strike a familiar, yet fearful note.

But as Biff and Kamuka stared in silence, Chandra's own face turned suddenly tense. From beyond the bend in the narrow road behind them came a distant, echoing answer:

"*Hyyyyaaaaahhhh!*"

It was Biff who broke the grim hush.

"Try it again, Chandra. Let's see how close they are."

Chandra repeated the call in a louder wail that must have carried farther, for now the answer came, not from behind them, but from the jungle reaches up ahead. To the startled boys, their plight was all too grimly plain.

On a forgotten road, walled on both sides by solid jungle, they were trapped between two murderous bands of approaching thugs!

VII

The Temple of Kali

AS THE boys stood rooted, the strange cries came again; first from one direction, then the other. But now there was a change in their weird tones. They trailed longer, as though the thugs were telling each other something, perhaps that they had helpless victims caught between.

Both Kamuka and Chandra sensed it. Kamuka was for taking to the jungle, a setting that he knew so well, even though it meant facing creatures different from those in Brazil. Chandra was willing to go along with that, but Biff overruled them with a single vote.

"They'd start beating the brush for us," he argued, "and that would only drive us deeper. It's not going into the jungle that I mind; it's our chance of ever coming out."

He was beckoning the other boys along the road as he added: "We must keep ahead of that bunch behind us, because they are really hot on our trail. Those up front are farther away, even though they are com-

ing toward us. We may still have time to find a clearing where we can hide, or better still, some jungle path."

Tensely, the boys quickened their pace. The road here was winding more sharply, for it was veering in among the low-lying hills. As they passed a turn in the road, Biff pointed ahead to a gap in the thick jungle, exclaiming, "That may be it!"

Again, long trailing cries came from both directions as though taunting Biff's hopes. The call from in back was still as far behind, but the one ahead was much closer. Gritting his teeth, Biff muttered for his own benefit, "This will have to be a path—or else!"

It was a path, but a rocky one, leading up a steep slope that flanked the road. But the boys took to it eagerly, climbing rapidly despite their packs, so as to reach the first spot where the path itself made a sharp turn amid the thick foliage.

Once there, they were out of sight from the road below, so they paused for a breather while they dipped water from a little stream that tumbled down among the rocks beside the zigzag path.

Biff asked Chandra, "Any idea where this path may take us?"

"Maybe nowhere," responded Chandra glumly. "It may just be an old stream gone dry."

"I don't think so." Kamuka studied the course of the stream with a practiced eye. "Look at the smooth rocks here in the stream, yet all those on the path are rough. If water came up there a lot, they would be smooth, too."

Chandra still was doubtful until Kamuka pointed far up the path.

"See where the path takes a short cut over the little hump of ground?" he said. "The stream would go around that, even in the wet season. This is a path, all right."

"And we'd better be using it," Biff put in, "before those thugs get the same idea."

Low calls of "*Hyyaahh*" from both directions down on the road below indicated that the pursuing groups were close together, probably closing what they thought were the jaws of a trap. Now that they had regained their wind, the boys lost no time in resuming their climb, this time at a steady, even speed that they were sure would keep them well ahead.

Kamuka was correct about the path. It was a real one, for soon it veered away from the stream entirely and brought the boys to a jutting promontory that gave them a good view over the green wave of the jungle slope below. There they rested again, while Biff traced the course of the road that they had left.

"If we could only cut across and strike the road a few miles up the line," he said, "we would really shake off those thugs. But no such luck, I guess. We'd never hack our way through all that growth. Let's stick to the path."

Sticking to the path meant further climbing, but it proved short, as the top of the hill was only a little way above. As they reached the final hump and emerged from the thick foliage, the boys stopped in surprise. Perched on the summit was a ruined temple,

Perched on the summit was a ruined temple

its white marble steps showing through the tangled underbrush, which was climbing up the battered pillars and weather-worn walls.

A corner of the tiled roof had fallen in and a tree projected there instead of a small dome, one of a group surrounding a larger central dome, which was also in a battered state. As the boys reached the steps, there was a sudden chatter from within the ruined temple, and troupes of monkeys scampered out through the holes in the roof and the long window slits in the walls

"A good hiding place," decided Chandra, "if the monkeys have been using it as their home."

"Then we can lie low here," Biff said, "until after the thugs have gone."

They were entering through a fancifully tiled archway as Biff spoke. Chandra extended a restraining hand as Biff turned toward an inner corner, where a battered stone railing marked a stairway leading to a floor below.

"Be careful where you lie low," warned Chandra. "These old places are alive with deadly cobras."

"But how can the monkeys live with the snakes?"

"They don't. Monkeys stay up there"—Chandra pointed to a balcony where tiny faces and quick little eyes were peering through what was left of a once ornamental railing—"and the cobras live in the pits below."

Biff saw that the stairway was blocked by broken chunks from the floor, but he eased away on the chance that a poisonous snake might be lurking in the

rubble. Kamuka, meanwhile, had crossed the floor to a small domed platform that was reached by steps leading up from three sides. Kamuka called:

"Biff," he called. "Come look! See who is here!"

Biff joined Kamuka and stared up at the most hideous idol he had ever seen. It was carved from a dark wood and had white, glaring eyes formed of tiny pearls with a jet-black stone in the center. Larger pearls formed the teeth of an open mouth, from which a carved, red-painted tongue extended.

The ferocious image had four arms extended from its body. One hand held an actual knife with jeweled handle and long curved blade, as though ready for a downward stroke. Another hand was raised in a warning gesture. The third dangled a carved human head. The fourth hand was thrust slightly forward and was cupped, but empty.

From the idol's neck hung a chain of human skulls, forming a huge, grotesque necklace. Biff had already guessed the identity of the carved horror, when Chandra arrived and gasped the name: "Kali!"

Biff stared at Chandra, wondering why he was so shaken. In a frightened tone, Chandra exclaimed:

"This temple is old and broken, but the idol is a new one! We can't hide here! This is where the thugs themselves meet to worship Kali. They have driven us up into their trap, and they will come here to hunt us down. See that hand, Biff, the one like a cup? It is supposed to hold blood, so it is waiting for the big ruby that you carry!"

An odd fascination had gripped Biff as he studied

the hideous figure of Kali. He snapped out of it now.

"What are we waiting for?" he demanded. "Let's get out of here!"

They couldn't go out the way they had come in. Already, a long-drawn cry was sounding from the path leading up to the temple. It was answered almost from the doorway, and the boys realized now that other members of the Kali cult must have been lurking in the fringes of the jungle, watching their arrival.

Kamuka, quick as ever, pointed out a corner stairway leading up to a stone balcony in the rear wall, just above the Kali statue. Sunlight shone through a slitted window that was located there. Grabbing their belongings, the boys raced up the steps, then along the balcony, where they jumped its broken gaps. They reached the window slit and squeezed themselves through to a narrow outer ledge, where they pressed their backs against the wall and stared downward hopelessly.

They were high up in the temple now, the equivalent of about three floors in an ordinary building. There, a full thirty feet below, was a stone court at the rear of the temple wall. The paving was cracked, but as hard as ever—anything but a happy landing.

Close to the wall was the circular rim of a stone well, but it was built up only a few feet from the courtyard. Not a slit, not an opening showed in the wall itself, as the boys studied it cautiously, except for a few irregular cracks that would afford no hold whatever.

If they had arrived here sooner, they could have planned some way to lower themselves to the courtyard, but that was too late for Biff and his companions now.

Already, high-pitched cries of glee were sounding from within the very walls of the crumbling temple that the thugs had turned into a trap baited with their idol, Kali.

VIII

Chandra Finds a Way

"MOVE along, Biff—just a little—"

Chandra, crouched on the ledge, was holding a chunk of stone in his extended hand as he pressed Biff slightly to one side. Chandra dropped the stone, and Biff watched it plummet downward into the courtyard well, where it struck with a splash that sent ripples spreading like a bull's eye.

"Now watch me," said Chandra. He tossed his pack down into the courtyard and stood straight up at the exact spot where he had crouched. "My feet are here, by this mark. I step off to there"—he extended his arm again—"and bring hands at sides, feet together. . . ."

Chandra finished by doing just that. He stepped out into space, hands at sides, brought his other foot forward and arrowed straight downward! Biff and Kamuka watched amazed, expecting a crash landing. Instead, Chandra followed the exact path of the stone that he had dropped. The circular well seemed to spread its opening wide to receive him as he hit the water with a sharp *plunk* and vanished.

Then, after what seemed interminable seconds, Chandra popped up from the surface, reached his arms wide and pulled himself out of the well, which Biff was pleased to see was larger in diameter than it looked. That, Biff realized, was the real mental hazard.

"Either look straight ahead, Kamuka," he told his friend, tossing his pack-kit and his Sikh turban down into the court, "or just shut your eyes the way I am going to do. Anyway, stand right on Chandra's mark" —Biff took that position as he spoke—"step off, bring your feet together—"

With that, Biff, too, dropped. Never before had he known a split second to divide itself into as many moments as those. All the way down, he was wondering if his step had been too long or too short, or whether he had let his body waver. Thirty feet seemed like thirty years, until Biff punched the water squarely and went deep, deep, deep, then came upward faster, faster, and hauled himself out the way Chandra had.

Before Chandra could extend congratulations to Biff, another pack-kit hit the paving beside them. Kamuka was ready to take off, and for the first time, Chandra expressed the worry that he really felt.

"Climb up quick, Biff!" he said, from his side of the well. "If Kamuka misses—if he wiggles—we must keep him from hitting stones too hard!"

Biff came up on the opposite side, ready to help break Kamuka's fall, but it proved unnecessary. A lithe brown form streaked feet first between the ready hands that Biff and Chandra extended and was gone as the water sprayed up from the well.

Chandra popped up from the surface and reached his arms wide

"Gone!" exclaimed Chandra. "Like Jinnah Jad says when I do basket trick. Now watch me bring him back!"

He waved his hands above the well, and Kamuka bobbed up grinning. Chandra and Biff grabbed his arms and hauled him out, anxious to get started on their way. Picking up their luggage, they cut off to a far corner of the courtyard where steps led down into another jungle path.

Minutes later, they were lost beneath a lattice of spreading green, descending a slope that was leading them away from danger instead of into it. Chandra began to chuckle happily and finally exploded into mirth.

"They will never guess where we have gone," the Indian boy said gleefully. "They will wait, those followers of Kali, thinking that we will come creeping back like the monkeys and the cobras. They will look for us and will think that we are hiding, waiting, somewhere in the ancient temple."

"Maybe," put in Kamuka, "they will look where we jumped."

"What then?" rejoined Chandra. "They will find nothing. Everything will be dry around the well by that time."

"I'll say it will," agreed Biff. "Our clothes are dry already. You certainly found the quick way out, Chandra."

"Like I did from the porthole in your cabin," reminded Chandra. "You said it was a good trick, so I showed you."

"But where did you learn it?"

"From my great-great-great-grandfather, up near Delhi. He still dropped into an eighty-foot well when he was eighty years old."

Biff had heard of the famous well jumpers, who for centuries had performed their amazing feat of dropping straight down an eighty-foot shaft that was only eight feet wide. That dated back to when the Great Moguls had ruled India and the skill had been handed down from father to son for generations until the British government had forbidden it as too dangerous.

"But I thought they stopped well jumping—"

Biff caught himself, afraid that he would offend Chandra, but the Indian boy took it in good humor.

"You mean like they stop thugee?" laughed Chandra. "They tried, but thugs go underground so we still go under water. The big difference"—Chandra turned serious now—"was that thugs hurt other people and *should* be stopped, but well jumpers hurt nobody but themselves and even then, not very often."

"I guess not," agreed Biff, "or your great-great-grandfather wouldn't have been in the game at eighty."

"My great-great-great-grandfather."

"My mistake," said Biff. "So your people still kept on jumping down wells?"

"No, we obey the law," returned Chandra. "We stop. But we practice in open pools, just like other people dive. Sometimes at night, we take full moon as target. We drop a stone from a high riverbank,

where the moon shows in the water. Then we step off like we three just did."

"It's lucky you showed us how, Chandra," Biff said. "We never would have tried it on our own. Would we, Kamuka?"

Kamuka shook his head emphatically. "I should say not!" he responded.

Fortunately, Biff, who was a good diver, had often stepped off springboards or diving platforms as a stunt. Kamuka, too, had used the same technique from the edge of high piers on the Amazon, when boats were moored too close to allow a normal dive. So they had been ready and able to copy Chandra's well jump without hesitation, when the time had called for instant action.

A few hours of steady plodding along the gradually descending path brought the boys to a level clearing studded with the remains of a long-abandoned town. Piles of ancient bricks represented the walls of houses, though enough were still standing to mark the lines of streets and market squares. A slightly higher clearing showed a row of sculptured stone pillars, remains of an ancient temple. From another such space loomed the ruins of what must have been a maharajah's palace, for its walls gleamed like alabaster in the sunlight.

"I have heard of this place," nodded Chandra. "They have been making excavations here. Down a road we will come to a waterfall, then we will go past big quarries, then finally we will reach the Grand Trunk Road."

Though the boys were practically sure that they

had outdistanced any pursuit, they still were taking no chances. They found the road that Chandra mentioned, and though it was scarcely more than wheel ruts, the hiking was good along it. After a few miles they came to the waterfall, which tumbled from a rocky ledge amid the massed green foliage, forty feet above. Its sheer descent ended in a rock-rimmed pool, which brought a whimsical comment from Kamuka.

"Looks like the waterfall is trying a well jump itself. Maybe we should go up and drop down with it, no?"

"No," agreed Biff. "But that pool looks deep enough for a good swim. What's stopping us?"

Nothing was stopping them. By now, they were drenched with perspiration after their steady hike, so a swim was in order. Soon they were cavorting in the cool water, which was even deeper than they had thought, and swimming close enough to the foot of the falls to catch its spray, yet avoiding the pounding mass of falling water.

As Biff climbed out, Chandra called to him from the pool:

"Maybe you go back to your American clothes, hey? Nobody we meet will guess who you are. You'll find them in my pack."

That was the best idea yet, for Biff was tired of his Sikh costume, particularly the bothersome turban. While Chandra and Kamuka were finishing their swim, Biff dressed in his own clothes. Then he strolled over to look at an ancient stone platform that someone had uncovered from the jungle roots.

The floor of burnt-clay bricks was set with colorful tiles that formed a broken pattern and from the six-sided shape of the platform, Biff decided it must have been a summerhouse frequented by the maharajah's courtiers. Some of the broken tiles had been stacked at the edge of the platform, and Biff picked them up to examine them.

They looked like some form of terra cotta, though they showed no traces of a glaze. Biff was stooping to replace them, when he heard a hiss behind him. Instantly, Biff wheeled about and instinctively voiced a sharp, warning cry, even before he saw the thing that he knew would be there.

Swelling up from the rubble was a scaly, bulbous neck, with odd, heart-shaped markings that gave it the look of a face with leering eyes and grinning lips. But the creature's own small head and beady eyes were above that puffed-out neck that came rising higher, as token of its deadly rage.

The hissing menace was a cobra, one of the most venomous snakes in India. Rearing to a height of nearly two feet, the cobra was within striking distance of Biff's leg, and poised, ready to deliver death from its dreaded fangs!

IX

The Man in the Jeep

BIFF had given his quick cry as a warning to the other boys, though he was the one who needed help. Fortunately, it worked both ways, for Chandra, who had come from the pool and was putting on his clothes, turned quickly in Biff's direction when he heard that sharp call.

Chandra didn't have to see the cobra to know that it was there. Often before, he had seen and heard people react the way Biff had. In response, Chandra automatically voiced a warning of his own:

"Don't move, Biff! Stay right where you are!"

That was about all that Biff could do. His quick spin had brought him back against the stack of old bricks and tile. He would trip over them, if he tried to retreat farther.

The cobra's mood was in a sense defensive, which made it all the more dangerous. Biff had disturbed the snake; that was why it had risen to action. Now it was waiting for some further motion to guide its deadly stroke. The chance fall of a loose tile, the

passing shadow of a bird in flight might be enough. Unless something could completely divert the snake, Biff's chances of getting clear seemed almost nil.

Grimly, Biff wished that their equipment included a shotgun, but the boys had no firearms among them. Chandra was approaching, but all he held was a little stick no longer than an ordinary ruler. Biff heard him say to Kamuka:

"Get tree branch—with lots of leaves—have it ready when I reach for it."

Biff groaned inwardly. A tree branch to fight off a cobra! Then Chandra had placed the stick to his lips and was piping a tune. The stick was a little flute!

Edging Biff's way, Chandra crouched until his shoulders were level with Biff's waist. Facing the cobra, Chandra swayed slowly back and forth. As if captivated by the tune, the cobra's hood began to bob in the same rhythm!

Never, at the end of a swing, did Chandra give the cobra time to strike. Playing the flute with one hand, Chandra reached over his far shoulder with the other and gripped a leafy tree branch that Kamuka gave him. Still swaying, Chandra carried the snake's attention more and more toward the extended branch.

Deftly, Chandra thrust the branch forward and downward. The cobra struck with all its deadly purpose, but its fangs met twigs and leaves, nothing more. Chandra had dropped the branch and flung himself in the opposite direction, jolting Biff away from danger in case the cobra turned and tried to strike anew.

Kamuka, by then, was peppering the snake with

stones that he had gathered while bringing the tree branch. Under that barrage, the cobra hastily sought refuge in the rubble, where Biff, after his close shave with death, was very glad to see it go. "Whew!" he said, wiping perspiration from his forehead. "Thanks, fellows! You're good men to know! How did you learn to charm snakes, Chandra?" he asked. "Did Jinnah Jad teach you that, too?"

"In a way, yes," Chandra acknowledged. "Jinnah Jad and I watched snake charmers often. He told me how they do their tricks."

The boys gathered their packs and resumed their hike along the rutted road.

"But how can music make snakes dance?" Kamuka asked abruptly. "In Brazil, our snakes hear nothing except a big loud noise, when somebody shoots a gun or whacks water with a paddle."

"In that case," said Biff, "it's probably more a matter of the snake sensing a vibration than any keen hearing. Maybe that's why the flute music sways them." He turned to Chandra. "Or is it?"

Chandra grinned. "Flute music makes me sway," he said, "so it makes the cobra sway."

"Because it watches you," Biff said, "not because it hears the music? So actually, you don't need the flute, do you?"

"But I do need it," insisted Chandra seriously. "Without it, I move too slow or too fast." He swung his head lazily, then bobbed it in jerky fashion. "But with music, I sway just right."

He brought out the flute and began to play it, giv-

ing his head and shoulders the easy, rhythmic weave that they had followed before.

"You've convinced us, Chandra, so put it away," Biff said. With pretended anxiety, he looked back over his shoulder. "Next thing, you'll have a pack of cobras following us!"

More such banter spiced the hike until they reached the quarries, where Biff called a halt because he wanted to study them. They were sandstone quarries, dating back many centuries, and they were still being worked, which interested Biff immensely. The road was much better from then on, because it had to be kept in shape for the trucks that hauled the stone. The boys passed a few of those trucks as they continued on their way.

It was afternoon when they reached the Grand Trunk Road, which lived up to expectations. The hiking was pleasant and easy, for there were many shade trees planted along the famous highway, some so tall that they arched across the road. The boys saw elephants and camels, but ox-carts were more common and seemed to be a highly popular mode of travel.

There were cars, too, and an occasional bus, but these modern vehicles were badly handicapped by flocks of sheep that were in no hurry to get off the road. There were throngs of pilgrims also, who added to the traffic tangle. Most exasperating of all were the cows, which were held in such high esteem that there was no rushing them at all. They just took their own sweet time and let motorists chafe.

Biff and his companions were specially aware of

this when they overtook the same jeep no less than three times. It was driven by a man who wore a blue beret, a pair of sunglasses, and a white shirt with short sleeves. He first went whizzing by the boys as though he intended to burn up the road for miles ahead, but they soon caught up with him, following patiently behind an assortment of pilgrims, ox-carts, and sheep. On foot, the boys could work their way through that medley, but the jeep couldn't.

Again, after the jeep had passed them, they came upon it parked beside a tea stand. The boys themselves stopped later at a village inn, for by this time they were ravenously hungry. It was there that the jeep roared by the second time. But when they caught up with it again, stalled behind a herd of sacred cows, the driver had taken off his beret and glasses and was asleep behind the wheel, as if he didn't care.

Chandra, by then, was worried over their own problems. Their long detour by jungle paths had delayed them more than he had anticipated, and their heavy hiking of the morning had caused them to loiter, once they were on the Grand Trunk Road. Now, all three were tired and showing it.

"We won't make Supari tonight," declared Chandra. "Not at this rate."

"Does it matter?" asked Biff. "I saw other people camping in a mango grove, so why can't we?"

"It would not be safe for us," insisted Chandra. "We were marked once; we may be marked again."

"Maybe we can get a hitchhike—"

Biff was interrupted by the honking of horns from

two cars that had come up behind the jeep. The man behind the wheel awoke with a start, saw that the cows were ambling off the road ahead and that the other cars were anxious to go through. Apparently he was still sleepy, for he pulled the jeep aside and let the traffic pass. Mopping his forehead with a big blue handkerchief, the man looked from behind the wheel and saw the three boys with their packs. He called in English:

"Wait, there! Can any of you chaps drive a jeep?"

"Yes," replied Biff, stepping over to the jeep. "I can."

"Then pile your packs on board," the man invited, "and take the wheel. I'm dog-tired and I need some sleep, but I still have to get somewhere tonight."

Despite the man's English speech and manner, he had something of an Oriental look, and when Biff met his gaze, he felt a fleeting recollection of having seen the man before. Then Biff was smiling at the way he had let his own memory trick him. Naturally, he'd seen the man before—twice when they'd caught up with the jeep—three times when it had gone by Biff and his companions.

The man was already moving from behind the wheel, so Biff took over and waved for Chandra and Kamuka to get in back, which they did, packs and all. Neatly, Biff zigzagged the jeep in among the dispersing cows and stepped up to a twenty-mile-an-hour rate that seemed a break-neck speed after a day of

plodding on foot. The owner of the jeep evidently approved of Biff's driving, for he promptly drifted into a satisfied doze.

Slowdowns and halts were frequent, of course, and during those intervals, Biff took a closer look at the sleeping man. He noted that the man's hair was dark and shocky, his complexion tawny, his features broad but smooth, except when he let his chin slump down too far; then, his jowls looked heavy. Most noticeable were his ears, which spread out quite widely from his head. Otherwise, he was handsome, in a rugged way, and he looked vigorous for his age, which Biff placed somewhere in the forties.

Before an hour was up, Chandra spoke from the back seat. "We are getting near Supari now!" he said. At the sound of the strange voice, the broad-faced man woke up and was immediately alert. Only for an instant did he appear puzzled at seeing Biff at the wheel of the jeep. Then, with a broad smile, he said. "Supari. That is not far from Keewal, the place where I am going."

"You are going to the old game preserve?" inquired Chandra politely.

"Yes," the man replied. "The head *shikari* has invited me to a tiger hunt there." He turned to Biff. "Take the next side road, and I will drop you off near Supari. I can then go on to Keewal."

It was more than a mile to the side road, and Biff would have missed it if Chandra hadn't pointed it out, for it was merely ruts, like the road they had followed

earlier in the day. And such ruts! At times they disappeared in grass so thick that Biff had to guide the jeep by the clearing in the low, scrubby trees ahead.

All the while, the broad-faced man smiled approvingly at the way Biff handled the jeep, while Biff himself was glad that he was not driving a more conventional type of car. At one place, the ruts reappeared, to turn themselves into a bridge consisting of two tree trunks, smoothed to form treadways only about a foot in width. But Biff rode over them perfectly, although the slightest sideslip would have dumped the jeep and its occupants into a ten-foot gully.

Then the ruts became an actual road, which was alternately a series of rocky ledges which made the jeep jump, or dust so deep that the car wallowed to its axles. Yet the man with the broad, rugged face never spoke a word, but left the driving up to Biff, as did the boys in back. It was only when Biff made a sharp turn into a slightly smoother but still dusty stretch that Chandra spoke up:

"We get off here to go to Supari."

It wasn't yet sunset, and they had made it! The huts of the village showed across the open fields, a mile away, with clumps of thick woods forming a colorful background. As Biff stepped from the jeep, the broad-faced man moved over behind the wheel and clapped his hand on Biff's shoulder in approval.

"Look me up at Keewal," the stranger said. "I can use you as an alternate driver on my next trip. The head shikari will tell you where to find me."

He was sliding the jeep into gear as Biff and the other boys stood there, shouldering their packs.

"May I ask your name, sir?" Biff inquired.

The rugged man smiled broadly, as he gave it:

"Just ask for Barma Shah."

With that, the jeep was off in a cloud of its own dust and Biff was echoing in amazement: "Barma Shah!"

X

The Tiger Hunt

ALL the way across the fields to the village, Biff was brimming with excitement because they had met Barma Shah, the secret agent mentioned by Diwan Chand, and the all-important contact to Biff's father. But Biff's enthusiasm was marred by disappointment.

"If I'd only told him who I was!" he exclaimed. "All the while I was driving the jeep, I was holding back on that, thinking that to say anything to anybody might be giving ourselves away."

"Barma Shah is very smart," reminded Chandra. "Perhaps he knew who you were."

"What makes you think that, Chandra?"

"We kept seeing jeep over and over. It went past us—we went past it—as if it was keeping watch on us."

"But that was due to all the traffic—"

"Traffic did not hold us up after Sahib Shah let you drive his jeep. Next thing, we were practically here at Supari."

"You may be right, Chandra," Biff agreed.

They had reached the actual village now, a mass of closely built huts with mud walls and tiled roofs, surrounded by yapping, nondescript dogs. It was almost sundown, and from this central point, the fields and trees looked dark and gaunt against the spreading purple of the sky. Now people, mostly in native costumes, were flocking out, first in alarm, then in a wild welcome when they recognized Chandra.

Biff and Kamuka were included in the villagers' enthusiasm, and then Chandra's uncle, the *patwari*, was greeting them and introducing them, in turn, to the *patel*, or head man of the village. The boys were supplied with cups of rich, delicious milk, and later they were taken to a modern building that served as school and community house, a symbol of the new India.

There, they feasted on tasty curry and rice, followed by fruits and cakes. Chandra, meanwhile, kept up a running chatter with his uncle and other villagers, mixing English with Hindi and the local native dialect. From the tone of the talk, Biff and Kamuka gathered that something quite serious was afoot. Chandra finally supplied the details.

"You will meet Barma Shah very soon," Chandra told Biff, "because my uncle tells me that the head shikari at Keewal has asked the village people to help trap a tiger tomorrow night."

"Aren't tigers usually hunted in the daytime?"

"Not this kind," declared Chandra. "This tiger is a cattle stealer, and lately he has prowled near the village, killing people after dark. That is why there

was so much excitement when we arrived close to nightfall."

As they left the community house, Biff heard the incessant barking of the dogs on the fringe of the town. Watchmen with big spears were on patrol. Many lanterns were aglow, showing that the village was tense and alert. Wisps of grayish smoke coiled from the chimneys and wavered, like fading ghosts, against the vast blackness of the starlit sky.

But when they entered the snug hut which Chandra smilingly termed their *daulat-khana*, or "palace," Biff felt that the outside world was far away. His bed was a simple *charpoy*—tapes strung to its frame instead of springs or mattress—but Biff was so tired that nothing could have been more comfortable. The calls of the patrolling watchmen, the distant barking of the dogs, simply lulled him off to solid sleep.

It was nearly noon when Biff awoke. He and Kamuka followed Chandra around the village, where they saw weavers, shoemakers, carpenters, and blacksmiths at work. Chandra explained that they were paid off in crops raised by the farmers who made up most of the community. But today, the carpenters and metal workers were combining their efforts in constructing huge wooden frames that were set with heavy bars of iron.

"Why, that looks like a big portable cage!" Biff exclaimed.

Chandra's uncle, the patwari, was standing by. He smiled and responded, "It is exactly that. Tonight, we use it to trap the killer tiger."

"You mean he may walk right into it?"

"No, no!" The patwari shook his head. "The bars are to keep the tiger out, so the living bait will be safe inside the cage."

"But don't you just stake out some animal?" asked Biff. "So the tiger will think it is loose?"

"Usually we do that with a pig or buffalo," replied Chandra's uncle, "but this tiger has tasted human blood. So tonight we will try human bait. That is the purpose of the cage."

"And the bait," put in Chandra proudly, "will be Kamuka and myself. We are going in with Thakur, the head watchman and chief hunter of the village."

"We are sorry to leave you out, Biff," added Kamuka in explanation. "You were still asleep when they asked us, and it was only after we said, 'Yes,' that we found they only had room for two."

Biff thought at first that his friends were joking, but it turned out they were quite in earnest. The cage had been specially designed for Thakur and two lookouts, preferably boys. But the village youths had become so tiger-conscious that they were seeing jungle cats every time a leaf stirred in the underbrush. So Chandra and Kamuka had been recruited for the job instead.

Biff put on a show of disappointment, if only to impress Chandra's uncle and the other villagers.

"Maybe Barma Shah, the man with the jeep, will want me to help him," Biff said. "I'll ask him when I see him."

Late in the afternoon, the barred frames were ready,

and they were hauled by ox-cart to a *shola*, or patch of jungle not far from the town. That was where the tiger had attacked and slain its victims, so the villagers had shunned the place for the past few days.

During that period, Matapar, the head Shikari from Keewal, had put up platforms in surrounding trees, covering the open area where the tiger liked to prowl. By now, he hoped the tiger would be used to it, but the cage idea did not appeal to Matapar. That had been thought up by Thakur, the village huntsman.

So Matapar and the other shikaris watched silently, almost glumly, while Thakur and his helpers set up the cage close to a thicket that they thought would be inviting to the tiger. They were fixing the frames together with crude bolts when Barma Shah drove up in his jeep, wearing his pulled-down beret and dark sun glasses.

Biff walked over to meet him and as Barma Shah nodded a greeting, Biff announced, "I am Biff Brewster."

"I was sure of that," rejoined Barma Shah, extending his hand in greeting, "but because of your mission I thought it best to introduce myself first and let you make the next move."

"I'm doing that now," stated Biff. "Sir—what have you heard from my father? Where is he?"

Despite himself, Biff betrayed anxiety in his tone. Barma Shah noticed it and put reassurance into his reply.

"I haven't heard from him," he said, "but I know

that he went to Kashmir and that he has probably gone on from there. His mission was there, mine was in Calcutta."

Barma Shah paused and glanced about to make sure that no one was close enough to hear. Then he inquired:

"You have the ruby Diwan Chand gave you?"

Biff fingered the bag beneath his shirt collar and nodded. "Right here," he said.

"Good. Your father will be needing it. We can talk more of this tomorrow."

Barma Shah was carrying a modern rifle with what appeared to be a large telescopic sight mounted on top of the barrel. That reminded Biff of an important request.

"The other boys are going into the cage with Thakur," he stated. "Could you post me on a platform or somewhere, sir?"

Barma Shah paused a moment, then nodded. "I have the perfect job for you. I need a driver for the jeep, which I am keeping in reserve with two shikaris, in case anything goes wrong. By turning it over to you, I can post myself on one of the platforms."

By sundown, the scene was set. Thakur was in the cage, gripping a big shotgun and flanked by Chandra and Kamuka, each armed with a spear. Barma Shah had picked himself a platform up in a tree. Matapar and other shikaris were up on their platforms, all at ideal range. Biff was as far off in the jeep as space would allow, down at the end of a long, smooth gully

that practically formed a roadway to the clearing. In the back seat, two more shikaris sat ready with their rifles.

But as dusk gathered, tension grew. The cage was the focal spot. If the tiger approached too close, Thakur was to drive him back with quick shots. Then Barma Shah, Matapar, and the rest would open fire with their rifles, covering practically the entire clearing. Biff's job was to come up with the jeep, only when needed—early, if anything went badly wrong; later, if all went well.

From the way things had been planned, they seemed likely to go well, but that depended partly on the tiger. Usually, he picked his victims just before dark, but this evening he was wary. Chandra and Kamuka gave occasional calls, putting a frightened tremolo into their voices, hoping to coax the striped terror into seeking them. But the darkness thickened and then became almost total in the clearing, before the cunning cat decided to strike.

Then it happened, like the surge of an invisible fury. Sharp-eyed though they were, neither Chandra nor Kamuka caught the slightest glimpse of the five-hundred-pound tiger until its ten feet of furred lightning landed squarely on the cage with the destructive force of a living thunderbolt. The cage buckled, hurling the occupants on their backs. Thakur's shotgun spouted straight upward, missing the tiger entirely, as the creature, somewhat jolted, recoiled to the ground in front.

Thakur, coming to his knees, aimed at the spot

where the tiger crouched, but as he fired the second barrel, the furred fury made another high, hard spring, clearing the path of aim. Again, the cage was jarred, and now Thakur, desperate, grabbed a spear from Chandra and jabbed wildly through the bars, blindly trying to drive off the snarling killer that he could not see.

Given time, Thakur might have made a telling thrust; but meanwhile, the tiger threatened to maul the cage apart. The framework was splintering under the fierce stroke of its claws. With each new spring, the iron bars were loosened. Barma Shah and the others on the platforms could not open fire with their rifles, for Thakur, so far, had failed to drive the tiger back. In the darkness, their shots would be more likely to hit Thakur or the boys.

The clanging echoes carried far down the gully, where Biff was puzzled by the lack of rifle fire, but not for long. Biff realized what must be going on, when the clashing sounds continued; and so did the men in back. Their grunts practically said, "Get going!" as did the clicks from their rifles, when they released the safety catches

Biff got going, as he had been told to do in such an emergency. He gunned the jeep into life, shot it straight up the gully, guiding by the outline of the clearing against the starry sky. The speeding jeep wallowed in the gully's slopes, then reached the open ground as Biff clicked on the lights and jammed the brakes.

The sudden glare outlined the whole front of the

cage, showing the tiger turning, snarling at the sound of the jeep's approaching roar. Briefly, the tiger was blinded and helpless, giving the men in the jeep their opportunity. They sprang out, dodged over toward the brush, and opened fire. One shot grazed the tiger; another clipped him, as he bounded away from the cage, spun in the air and sprawled beyond the light.

The shikaris from the jeep started over to examine their prize, but paused when warning shouts came from both the cage and the tree platforms. Half-stunned, the tiger picked itself up, snarled at the two shikaris as they dived away from the light. Then the tiger itself took to the darkness on the other side, but not in flight.

It had another purpose. It wanted to claw, to rip apart its real tormentor, the thing with the blazing eyes that had interrupted the tiger's efforts to reach its caged prey. That thing was the jeep. In the darkness, the wounded tiger turned suddenly upon it

Biff raised a shout as he heard an approaching snarl. The jeep heaved upward, sideward as the tiger's bulk hit it between hood and windshield. In the dim glow from the dashlight, Biff could see the monstrous, clawing shape of the man-killer as it gathered itself for a final spring upon the new prey it had so unexpectedly found.

Through Biff's stunned mind ran the freakish notion that whatever luck the Light of the Lama had brought him, the ruby's charm had lost its power by now.

XI

A Thief in the Night

IN THEIR half-wrecked cage, Chandra and Kamuka realized all too thoroughly how the prospect of sure death had switched from them to Biff. After their experience, his frantic shout told them everything. It was pitch dark in back of the jeep's headlights. The marksmen in the trees couldn't even guess the tiger's location, let alone stop it with a chance shot.

But it wasn't a chance shot that came. From one of the platforms, a sharp beam of light cut a thin path through the blackness, turning a brilliant spotlight on the open jaws and glittering eyes of the great beast that was already mashing the jeep's windshield with its mammoth paw.

That sudden shaft of light was a bull's-eye in itself. Now, if a rifle muzzle could only score an identical hit! As that hope sprang to the boys who watched from the cage, it was answered in a realistic way. A rifle crackled. The tiger's big head jolted back, and its snarl broke.

Biff saw that happen as he looked up from behind

the wheel. Now, the tiny circle of light was focused just behind the tiger's ear. Again, the rifle spoke. The tiger's whole body came forward, but not in a lunge. Instead, its quarter-ton of dead weight landed across the jeep's hood, crushing it down upon the motor. Then the striped body rolled to the ground, where the sharp beam picked it out again, probing it from head to tail.

No further shots were necessary. Biff came up shakily behind the wheel, found that the jeep would still run, and backed it so the headlights shone full on the tiger. The creature not only was motionless; its odd, distorted pose proved that life had left it.

Barma Shah came down from his platform, bringing the rifle with the thing that looked like a telescopic sight above the barrel. Only it wasn't a telescopic sight; it was a special flashlight powered by multiple batteries and focused down to almost a needle-beam.

"I knew I might need this," declared Barma Shah, "so I tested it last night, at just the right range. The light is the rifle's sight." He lifted the gun, pointed it up into the trees and picked out the top step leading to the platform that he had just left. "Just spot your target, pull the trigger, and that's it."

"That *was* it," complimented Biff, "but it took a good cool hand and steady nerves to do it."

Barma Shah's rugged features spread into a broad smile. He suggested that instead of going back to the village, the boys accompany him to the hunting lodge at Keewal. Biff accepted the invitation, but Chandra wanted to return to Supari to give the villagers a first-

hand account of his harrowing experience in the cage. Naturally, he needed Kamuka to support his testimony, so Barma Shah agreed to pick them up at Supari in the morning.

The Keewal hunting lodge impressed Biff immensely, as it was equipped with all modern conveniences including air conditioning. It also had a telephone, to which Barma Shah gestured, as soon as he and Biff were alone. Then, with a broad, pleased smile, he declared:

"I talked with Calcutta by long distance this afternoon. You will be glad to know that Diwan Chand and his gatekeeper, Nathu, came out all right. Nobody was after them."

Biff grinned, then became serious. "I know that," he said. "They were after me—and this."

Biff brought out the watertight container. From it, he took the chamois bag, then the jewel case, finally, the huge, glowing ruby. He handed the jewel to Barma Shah, who studied it as though he had seen it often. Then, as the stone's glint suddenly became more vivid, Biff added, "Diwan Chand said its sparkle showed that the charm was working well. But you had a lot to do with that tonight."

"Tonight, perhaps, yes." Barma Shah returned the gem to Biff and shook his head. "But the other day, if I had known you would run into that trouble at Chand's, I would have gone there myself, instead."

"But Mr. Chand said that you were marked."

"True. But so were you, as it turned out."

"Yes," agreed Biff, "but Chandra helped me out

fast enough. Our real trouble was with the thugs on the road."

"Thugs? On the road? Tell me about that."

Biff detailed the incidents of the train trip, the detour by the old abandoned temple, and their final arrival on the Grand Trunk Road. As he concluded the account, Barma Shah shook his head again.

"And to think that I let you go through all that," he said, "while I was waiting for you on the Grand Trunk Road."

"But how," queried Biff, "did you know that we were coming that way?"

"From your father," explained Barma Shah. "He told me all about Chandra, the boy who worked for Jinnah Jad. That is why I came here to Keewal, so I would be near the village of Supari, where Chandra's uncle lives. Naturally, Chandra would bring you there."

"But how did we happen to come along just when you were here for a tiger hunt and the villagers were so terribly excited over it?"

"They are always tiger hunting here at Keewal," replied Barma Shah with a smile, "and the people in Supari are easily excited. If Matapar cries, "Tiger! Tiger!" he knows that Thakur will bring out the villagers as beaters by day and even as bait by night."

"I never thought of that."

"And I never realized that the thugs were so active again," commented Barma Shah. "The way the Kali cult took over that old temple is surprising indeed. I shall notify the local authorities and have them inves-

tigate it. Perhaps it is more widespread than it appears."

The next day, Barma Shah and Biff drove over to the village and picked up Chandra and Kamuka. They continued on their way, laughing over the fact that of all the party, the one that had taken the worst beating from the tiger hunt was the jeep. However, the staunch vehicle was in good running order, and the boys began to enjoy their tour with Barma Shah.

A tour it actually became, for Barma Shah decided it should be that way. He even insisted that Chandra put on European clothes similar to what Biff and Kamuka were wearing. So they stopped at the first important town on the Grand Trunk Road and bought Chandra his new outfit.

Chandra was amazed when he studied himself in a big mirror at the clothing store.

"This is better than any jadoo," decided Chandra. "If Jinnah Jad should put me in the basket wearing my old clothes and bring me out in new, like these, people would think I was a different boy."

"You'd have to make jadoo yourself," returned Biff. "It would take real magic for you to change clothes while you are curled around the inside of that basket."

Chandra laughed at that, and then the laugh was turned on Biff when Barma Shah picked out a woven straw hat with a rounded, dome-shaped crown and broad, sharply down-turned brim. He placed it on Biff's head, saying, "Try this on for size." The hat was so big that it came clear down over Biff's eyes, the brim hiding his face almost to the jawline.

"Looks like Biff is trying the basket trick himself,"

observed Chandra merrily. "Where did he go, Kamuka?"

"I don't know," replied Kamuka. "Last I saw, he was climbing into a basket that looked like a hat. Now he is vanished. Complete."

Biff whipped off the hat, somewhat red-faced and flustered, only to enjoy a laugh himself when he saw Chandra and Kamuka peering over counters and behind racks as though they were trying to find where he had gone. Then Barma Shah was handing Biff some smaller hats of the same style, and among them, Biff discovered one that was just his size.

"Very good," approved Barma Shah. "That brim still comes low enough to hide your hair rather well, and the sun visor helps too."

The visor was of dark, transparent plastic set in the front of the hat brim, and it added somewhat to the depth of Biff's tan. It proved helpful, too, when Biff was driving the jeep, for Barma Shah decided to travel along secondary highways that lacked the shade provided by the Grand Trunk Road.

Traffic, too, was less, but rough stretches of road slowed their trip. There were delays, too, at rivers where there were no bridges, only ferries that looked like tiny floats or rafts, the sort that might tip the jeep into the first current they encountered. But the rafts were well balanced, and the natives were skillful with their poles and oars. Each crossing was made without incident.

Barma Shah had brought sleeping bags and bedding so that they could stop at *dak* bungalows, or rest

houses, along the way. To all appearances, Barma Shah might have been a private tutor taking some privileged scholars on an educational tour of the Indian byroads; and in fact, the boys were learning a lot.

Biff was especially impressed by the monkeys. He thought he had already seen a lot of them in India, but now they were boldly jumping over the jeep whenever it stopped and ready to snatch up whatever they saw and wanted. Chandra said there were a hundred million monkeys in India. Biff was ready to believe it when they stopped at a dak bungalow near Agra and had to slam doors in the faces of the creatures to keep them from coming in the bedrooms.

That afternoon they drove into Agra to see the famed Taj Mahal on the bank of the Jamuna River. One of the world's most beautiful buildings, it impressed Biff as a dream brought to reality in living marble. Later, they went to a telegraph office where Biff sent a wire to his mother, which simply stated:

> ALL WELL. STILL ON WAY. LOVE TO YOU AND TWINS.

Barma Shah decided that the telegram told enough, yet not too much. He smiled when Biff also showed him a postcard with a picture of the Taj Mahal, which had the printed statement: *India's most priceless jewel, for you to hold in memory*. Under that, Biff had written, "And I really am holding it, bag and all. Biff." He had addressed the card to Likake Mahenili at Darjeeling.

"Send it," decided Barma Shah. "Only your Hawai-

ian friend will know that you mean the ruby rather than the Taj Mahal."

After dinner at a restaurant in Agra, they drove back to view the Taj by moonlight, when its graceful marble dome and slender minarets were softened into an incomparable silvery whiteness, a striking contrast to its splendor by day.

They were still talking about the Taj when they arrived back at the rest house, where they reduced their tones to whispers rather than rouse the monkeys, which apparently had gone to sleep in the trees. But when Biff himself was dozing off, he heard occasional patter on the roof and scratchy sounds outside his window, indicating that some of the creatures were about.

In his dreams, Biff could see monkeys swarming over everything, even the Taj Mahal, until oddly, they seemed to be clambering over the cot itself. Still half asleep, yet aware of where he was, Biff could feel their breath on his face, their pesky hands clutching at the bag containing the ruby.

Then Biff's eyes came open. He made a convulsive grab with both hands. In the filtering moonlight from the window, he saw a face that was human in size and form, yet leering like a monkey's. He caught hands that were human, too, but long, thin-fingered, and as writhing in their touch as a snake's coils.

Swiftly, expertly, those hands had grabbed the pouch that contained the great ruby and were twisting its chain around Biff's neck like a strangle cord!

XII

A Double Surprise

THE struggle that followed was frantic but brief. It couldn't have lasted long, for Biff was unable to wrench the attacker's hands from the chain that they so cruelly twisted. It was already cutting off Biff's breath and blood supply, so that his eyes were seeing black spots in the moonlight.

Biff shifted his grip to his attacker's throat, but it didn't help. If anything, it made him twist the chain harder. Biff couldn't call for help, though the walls of the bungalow were thin enough for even a gargly cry to be heard. But there was a way to make people hear.

As he lashed about, Biff managed to shove the cot away from the wall. Then, wrenching himself to a new position, he began kicking the wall with his feet, pounding a terrific drum beat. There was a muffled, excited cry from the next room, then answering shouts above the din that Biff was raising. The whole dak bungalow was aroused.

Right then, Biff was hoping to jab his attacker's neck nerves, judo style, which would have turned the

tables completely. But his squirmy foe didn't wait. He managed to yank the ruby bag clear from its chain. Gripping his prize, he twisted away, turned, and bounded for the window.

Biff beat him there, by rolling over on his hands and knees, then blocking the fugitive with a headlong dive. The squirmy man turned and darted toward the door, just as it burst open and Barma Shah came driving in. He met the attacker and snatched for the bag, which came open, spilling out the ruby. By then, Biff was piling into the fray. He and Barma Shah both grabbed for the gleaming gem, while the squirmy man took off empty-handed.

It was Barma Shah who saved the ruby with one hand, while he held Biff back with the other. Chandra and Kamuka were already taking up the chase from their rooms, as were other guests. Coolly, Barma Shah told Biff:

"Leave it to them. We don't want people to know what the fellow was after. Here is the ruby, so put it away again."

The advice was good, so Biff accepted it. For the moment, he wondered if they'd really regained the ruby, for it looked as dull as a lump of coal, there in Barma Shah's hand. But as Biff took it, all the gem's luster returned and it scintillated in the moonlight with a vivid fire that seemed to throw off living sparks. Satisfied, Biff put the ruby back in its bag.

The excitement roused hundreds of monkeys from their tree bunks, and with all their jumping and chatter, no one was able to catch up with Biff's attacker.

The *khansama* who kept the dak bungalow was all apologies when an examination showed that Biff's window screen had been loosened—by whom, no one knew. Barma Shah, as spokesman for the boys, dismissed it as a trifling matter.

But in the morning, Barma Shah went into Agra to talk to the police. He returned in time for an early lunch which the khansama, who was cook as well as innkeeper, had specially prepared. It consisted of *dal-moth*, or fried lentils with thin shavings of lentil paste; and it was followed by a dish of *petha*, a crystallized melon served in slices.

When Barma Shah and the boys pulled away in the jeep, he had made no further mention of the near-robbery of the night before. But as they rode along the highway toward Delhi, Barma Shah discussed the matter with the boys.

"The police weren't impressed," Barma Shah declared. "They say there is nothing to this talk of *thugee* coming back in the form of a Kali cult. People are simply confusing them with roving bands of thieves, like the old *pindaris*. Other countries have gangsters, why not India?"

"But we saw the Kali statue—" Biff began.

"I know. Well," declared Barma Shah, "whether that man last night was a petty thief or a thug playing a lone hand to deceive us, we won't take more chances."

Barma Shah's method was simple. They drove on to Delhi and pulled into the old city after dark. There, Barma Shah let the boys off on a quiet street and

continued on alone in the jeep toward Simla. He had given them an address where they could find him.

Only a block from where they were dropped off, the boys came to a rooming house that Barma Shah had mentioned. They stayed there overnight and began planning their next step, which was to reach the American Embassy without attracting special notice.

"See what you can find out, Chandra," suggested Biff. "Say that you're a student who would like to know about the United States. Remember, there are a lot of American nations, so be sure to specify the United States. Maybe we can slide you in there to pave the way for me."

All this was in keeping with advice from Diwan Chand in Calcutta, which Barma Shah in his turn had stressed even more; namely, that spies might be watching every move that Biff made. Events along the line had definitely underlined the need for caution. So Chandra, still wearing his European clothes, set out on a hired bicycle, the most popular type of transportation in India's capital city of New Delhi, which adjoined the old Mogul capital of Delhi.

A few hours later, Chandra rejoined the other boys in a colorful bazaar where he had left them.

"I have good news," he exclaimed. "Every week, students go by special bus to meet and talk with ambassadors from other countries."

"That sounds like a United Nations proposition," commented Biff.

"No, no," returned Chandra. "I checked that. They

go to a different country's embassy every week. So I look at the list, and what do you think is next? United States! Tomorrow!"

"Nice work," approved Biff. "That sounds like our ticket, all right."

"It is our ticket, all right." Chandra grinned. "Three tickets for bus tomorrow. I ask and I get them. So we go along with big crowd, and nobody will guess who we are."

Since the students were all from Indian schools located in New Delhi and elsewhere, Chandra and Kamuka decided to stay in their European clothes; but Biff, somewhat to his annoyance, had to switch back to his Sikh costume. Otherwise he would be spotted for an American and perhaps for himself, Biff Brewster, if some keen observer happened to be looking for him.

"I suppose any Sikh students will be wearing their native garb, too," commented Biff, "like the railroad guards on the train. So don't let them spot me for a phony the way that man with the fake beard did on the Howrah bus."

"Funny thing," said Chandra, "I keep thinking about him every now and then, I don't know just why. But don't worry. Kamuka and I will talk to people so they won't bother you."

The bus tickets were simply cards that said *Student* in English and its equivalent in Hindi characters. They were accepted without question, and the boys took seats well back in the bus, which was nearly full

when it started. All was fine until they stopped at a building where Biff looked up and saw a flag with three vertical stripes—red, white, and green.

"You've made a mistake, Chandra," Biff groaned. "This can't be the American Embassy. That's not the United States flag."

"It must be," argued Chandra. "Lots of countries change their flags. Maybe your country changes its flag, too."

"No, we don't change the United States flag."

From the bus window, Biff saw the flag flutter slightly, and now he noticed the emblem of an eagle on the white stripe.

"That's the Mexican flag," exclaimed Biff. As a sudden thought struck him, he asked, "Just what did that list say, Chandra?"

"It said students would pay visit to the embassy of the United States of—or—"

"The United States of Mexico!"

"Yes, that was it."

"It's my fault, Chandra," conceded Biff. "I forgot that Mexico is officially known as the United States of Mexico. I should have told you the United States of America. Then you'd have checked on the American Embassy." He turned to Kamuka. "Dumb of me, wasn't it?"

"Maybe I was dumb, too," returned Kamuka. "If I had told Chandra to look for United States of Brazil, he would have brought us to the Brazilian Embassy. I could tell our story there."

"You're right, Kamuka," acknowledged Biff. "We

had two chances out of three and we missed. Well, we can't sit here. We will have to follow the crowd."

Follow the crowd they did. As the last three off the bus, Biff and his companions tagged on into the Mexican Embassy and slid into a rear corner of the reception room where the students were seated. Members of the Mexican diplomatic corps proceeded to hold open forum with the students of New India, exchanging views on their respective countries. After an hour's session was completed, the students started out, shaking hands with the Embassy staff as they went.

Again, Biff and his companions held back. They were able to ease along behind the students, who were so interested in exchanging their own views that they did not notice the dragging trio. Biff particularly, was glad to avoid the handshakes. The diplomats showed interest in a few genuine Sikh students, and Biff was afraid he would be asked embarrassing questions.

There was just one greeter they could not avoid. Outside the reception room, a Mexican youth of about Biff's age had come up to shake hands with the students and was chatting briefly with them. Fortunately, his back was partly turned, so Biff saw a way to avoid him.

"You shake hands with him first, Kamuka," Biff whispered, "but keep moving or he may guess that you are a Brazilian. You crowd in fast, Chandra, and keep him talking while I slide by—"

They had reached the youth by then, and Kamuka's handshake was over too quickly. Chandra, caught off stride, could not think what to say, so the young

Mexican politely bowed him on with a brief shake; then turned with perfect poise to meet the last departing visitor, Biff.

The Mexican's expression was momentarily quizzical as he studied the face beneath the Sikh turban. Chandra and Kamuka, glancing back, were sure Biff was getting by with his disguise when, to their horror, Biff himself gave the game away. As though suddenly gone crazy, Biff flung away his turban, sprang forward, grabbed the Mexican boy's shoulders, and began shaking the poise right out of him.

The surprised youth gasped and grabbed at Biff as if in self-defense. Chandra and Kamuka turned to ward off any students who might come back to mix in the fray, only to see that they were all alone. That was when they heard Biff shout:

"Mike Arista!"

Then Chandra and Kamuka realized that it wasn't a fight at all, but just a genuine, heartfelt form of mutual recognition, as the Mexican boy exclaimed:

"Biff Brewster!"

XIII

Biff's Mission

THE excitement of the meeting over, Biff realized that introductions were in order. He turned to Chandra and Kamuka.

"This is Miguel Arista—Mike to us," Biff said. "He and I met in Mexico, where we went hunting for a lost Aztec treasure. We had some tough adventures together." Biff turned to Mike.

"This is Kamuka," Biff continued. "I told you once about the trip that I took up the Amazon with him. And this is Chandra, the newest member of the team. He steered us through a lot of trouble from Calcutta to New Delhi."

"And I am glad he did," returned Mike. "We've been watching for you everywhere, that is, for you and Kamuka, Biff. We hadn't heard about Chandra. We alerted the American and Brazilian Embassies in case you turned up there. So, of all things, you walked into the Mexican Embassy, the last place we expected to see you. How did that happen?"

"That," replied Biff with a smile, "was Chandra's idea."

"It looks like I picked the right United States," put in Chandra. He turned to Biff and Kamuka. "You had chance number one and two. That gave me chance number three. I hit it right."

"You sure did," Biff agreed. He turned to Mike. "But how do you come to be in India? How do you know about all this?"

"You remember my uncle, the judge in Mexico City?"

"Of course."

"I came here with him on a visit, and we happened to meet your father. My uncle can tell you about it, better than I can." Mike paused a moment, then asked: "Do you have the ruby?"

For answer, Biff looked around and saw that he and his friends were alone. Then he brought out the priceless packet, opened it, and displayed the Light of the Lama. It took Mike's breath away. Never before, perhaps, had the rare gem flashed more vividly, more dramatically, than at that moment. That was all Mike needed to see.

"Put it away," he said. "We'll go over to my uncle's hotel and talk to him "

Mike arranged for a cab, and they went to the hotel. There they met Judge Felix Arista, a quiet man with a white beard and flowing hair that gave him a very austere expression. But the kindly welcome that he gave to Biff put Chandra and Kamuka completely at their ease.

Then Judge Arista went further. He spoke to Kamuka in Portuguese, then to Chandra in Hindi, so fluently that both boys were quite overwhelmed. Judge Arista also assured Biff that all was well with his father, the last they had heard from him. Next, Judge Arista introduced a middle-aged man of military bearing named Colonel Gorak, who evidently held some key position with the government of India. Both were keenly interested in the ruby when Biff produced it. Then Judge Arista turned to the boys and said, "Tell us all that has happened."

Though Biff was eager to hear more about his father, he realized that Judge Arista was following proper procedure—learning the facts so that he and Colonel Gorak could weigh them. Biff related the events from the time the *Northern Star* had docked in Calcutta. Judge Arista encouraged Kamuka and Chandra to add their impressions. Chandra, especially, came in for questioning regarding Jinnah Jad, Diwan Chand, and Barma Shah.

All three boys had much to say about Barma Shah and their adventures with him, including how he had saved Biff's life during the tiger hunt and had later responded to Biff's call when a thug had tried to steal the ruby at the dak bungalow. Judge Arista finally turned to Colonel Gorak and said:

"I am sure that we can trust these other boys as well as Biff. So I think they should all hear what you have to tell him about Señor Brewster."

Colonel Gorak bowed acknowledgment, then spoke to Biff in an even, methodical tone.

"Your father came here to India to open some old gold mines," related Colonel Gorak. "We were hopeful that investors would supply money to work them. Among these mines were some that once belonged to the Rajah of Bildapore, a small domain that was absorbed by a larger princely state, though the Rajah's family still owned the mines until the Indian government finally acquired them.

"When miners went down into the old shafts, they met with inexplicable accidents. They claimed that the mines were haunted by ghosts and demons, but we blamed it on outside factions. However, Mr. Brewster found there was some basis for the superstition, as it was part of a legend dating back five hundred years."

As Colonel Gorak paused, Kamuka exclaimed despite himself, "Five hundred years! That is a long, long time!"

"Not in India," put in Chandra promptly. "Here it is very short."

"Quite true," agreed Colonel Gorak seriously. "Five hundred years ago, the ruling Rajah of Bildapore received a magnificent ruby from the Grand Lama of Chonsi, a lost city near the border of India and Tibet. The saying was, 'While the Light of the Lama shines, so will the Star of the Rajah'—and that proved true, for the mines showed steady profits and were finally sold at a good price.

"Part of those profits were invested in gems which the Rajah's family promised to give to the Chonsi Lama in return for the luck the ruby had brought

them. That was to be done if ever the Rajah's descendants disposed of their holdings, which they finally did. But Mr. Brewster learned that the gems had been hidden by loyal servants of the Rajah's family, because outsiders were seeking them."

As Colonel Gorak paused, Biff asked, "By outsiders, do you mean the Kali cult, sir?"

"For one, yes. For another, there is an international spy ring, run by an adventurer named Bela Kron. We know little about him, except that he will sell out to the highest bidder. Fortunately, Mr. Brewster located the gems and brought them here to New Delhi."

"And as I was here," added Judge Arista, "he came to see me first. I realized that this was an international matter, so I pressed it through proper channels, and Colonel Gorak was assigned to the case. He has done admirably with it."

Colonel Gorak shook his head to that.

"The real credit goes to Mr. Brewster," he insisted. "His story was fantastic, but he had the gems to prove it and Judge Arista to vouch for him. So we had him go to Ladakh in Eastern Kashmir, where he contacted secret messengers from the Grand Lama. They took him to Chonsi where he delivered the jewels with the compliments of our government. There was just one problem. The Light of the Lama was not among the gems."

With that, Colonel Gorak gestured to the huge ruby that was glowing in the sunlight as though its ruddy fire held all the secrets of the past centuries. Never had its sparkle been more vivid. No one could

wonder why this was the most prized gem of all.

"We should have thought of that beforehand," declared Judge Arista. "But we had not then seen the Light of the Lama." He studied the gem again, then turned to Colonel Gorak. "I can understand why the Chonsi Lama wants it," he said.

Colonel Gorak nodded. "So can I!" he agreed.

"Then the Lama is keeping my father in Chonsi?" asked Biff anxiously. "Until he gets the ruby—like a ransom?"

"Not exactly," replied Colonel Gorak. "Your father is still in Chonsi, yes—"

"Because they won't let him go?"

"No, no." It was Judge Arista who replied to Biff's anxious question. "I am sure that he could leave at any time, but his mission would not have been completed."

"He wants to deliver the ruby, too," explained Colonel Gorak, "and he was sure that Barma Shah would be able to locate it, because they had been working on it together, your father and Barma Shah."

That calmed Biff immediately. His mind flashed back to the tiger hunt, when Barma Shah had delivered that perfect shot while the shikaris were wondering what to do. Then he thought of the dak bungalow and the way Barma Shah had rescued him there. Chandra must have realized what was in Biff's mind.

"It is all right, Biff," Chandra said encouragingly. "Your father and Barma Shah—they are a team."

Biff brightened as he turned to Judge Arista.

"You mean that I'm to go with Barma Shah?" the

boy asked. "That he will be there, too, when we deliver the ruby?"

"Exactly that," acknowledged Judge Arista. "We are counting on both of you. Your father said that he had arranged for you to receive the ruby and that Barma Shah would do the rest."

"I have arranged for our trip to Chonsi," added Colonel Gorak. "We can notify Barma Shah to meet us in Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir. From there, we will fly to Leh, the capital of Ladakh, where our equipment has been ordered and is waiting for us."

Two thoughts swam through Biff's mind. In flying anywhere, he would like to be in a plane piloted by his uncle, Charles Keene, who—to Biff's thinking—was the greatest pilot ever. Next to his father, Uncle Charlie was the man he would most like to see right now. The other thought was—what was happening in Darjeeling? He felt concerned about his mother and the twins. And he was worried about Li, who by now probably was worried about him.

"*Su Tio Carlos,*" said Judge Arista, as though he had read Biff's mind. "Your Uncle Charles. We reached him in Burma and asked him to fly from there to Darjeeling, so he would be ready to take off for Leh, to join your party there. He is in Darjeeling now."

With that, Judge Arista picked up the telephone and handed it to Biff, adding with a kindly smile, "We have put in a long distance call to your family in Darjeeling. You can talk to them right now."

XIV

The Valley of Doom

BIFF was right about Li being worried. From the time he had arrived in Darjeeling, after a ride in from the airport at Bagdogra, Li's worries had begun and stayed with him. He was wondering constantly how much he could tell the Brewsters if they asked him point-blank about Biff.

Biff's mother, Martha Brewster, had met Likake Mahenili in Hawaii at the time Biff and Li had gone on their thrilling sea hunt together. The Brewster twins, eleven-year-old Ted and Monica, had met Li, too, and they were bubbling with delight at seeing him again.

Of course, they wanted to see their big brother, too, so they peppered Li with so many rapid-fire questions about Biff that Li hadn't time to answer any of them, which turned out for the best. In a slightly reproving tone, Mrs. Brewster had suggested that the twins give their guest a chance to speak for himself.

Thanks to that breather, as Biff would have termed it, Li was able to state simply that Biff and Kamuka

had gone directly to New Delhi in response to a message from Mr. Brewster.

"We heard from New Delhi, too," Mrs. Brewster said. "Mr. Brewster's company wired that he would be delayed and that Biff was being notified what to do."

"I'll bet Dad has taken Biff to see some super-special gold mines!" exclaimed Ted. "I wish he'd asked me along."

"That must be it," added Monica, "because Kamuka has been studying mining in Brazil. I'd like to have gone, too."

"It's nice to hear you two agree on something," was Mrs. Brewster's smiling comment, "but please notice that Likake isn't sulking because he wasn't taken on the trip. That's the way a real grownup would act."

Li didn't mention that Biff had also received a wire from the Ajax Mining Company. He merely said that he was sure they would hear from Biff as soon as he reached New Delhi. As the days passed, the twins had a wonderful time with Li. Among other things, they went on a picnic to Tiger Hill, where they viewed Mt. Everest, the world's highest peak, which towered more than 29,000 feet.

To Li, it was no more impressive than the 28,000-foot summit of Kanchenjunga, which could be seen from Darjeeling. But he reserved opinion on that and almost everything else, rather than start the twins speculating on what their brother Biff might think about it. The next step then would be—why hadn't they heard from Biff, a question Li couldn't answer.

Li was relieved when Biff's wire came from Agra, because he honestly didn't know why Biff had stopped there. But Li knew nothing yet of the postcard, which was still on its way when Mrs. Brewster's brother, Charles Keene, flew in from Burma and stated that he had been summoned to Darjeeling by an official call from New Delhi.

With Charles Keene in the twin-engine Cessna was a burly, red-haired mechanic known as Muscles, who hailed from the State of Kentucky and was proud of it. The plane also brought a Burmese boy named Chuba, who had guided Biff across the border into China, to rescue Biff's uncle when he had been a prisoner there. Biff had detailed those adventures to Li, who already regarded Chuba as an old friend.

So after a brief but hearty get-acquainted session, Li decided to confide in Chuba. They had taken a stroll to look at Kanchenjunga, which Li stated was the third highest mountain in the world. When Chuba asked what two were bigger, Li told him: Everest and K 2—known as Mt. Godwin-Austen—which was far north in Kashmir. Chuba shrugged at that.

"To me, Minya Konka looks bigger," he asserted. "That's the mountain Biff and I saw in China. Perhaps that is because we got a look at it from lower down."

"Kamuka would say that about the Andes," laughed Li. "To him, they would look bigger." Seriously, he added, "That was while you were hunting for Biff's Uncle Charlie?"

Chuba nodded.

"We may have to start a search for Biff's father,"

continued Li. "Biff only heard from him indirectly."

Noting Chuba's keen interest, Li told him all that had happened in Calcutta. He also mentioned his worry about whether or not he should inform Biff's family as to those facts, or wait until he received direct word from Biff. Chuba promptly solved that problem.

"You have trouble," Chuba told Li, "and Sahib Keene is trouble-shooter. If you don't hear from Biff by tomorrow, I'll talk to Sahib Keene. Then he will talk to you."

They didn't have to talk with Charles Keene the next day, for they talked to Biff himself instead. That was when the long distance call came from Judge Arista in New Delhi. Biff talked to his mother first, explaining the situation briefly. Then Judge Arista came on the wire, assuring Mrs. Brewster that all was probably well with her husband.

At the same time, Judge Arista stated that the trip to Chonsi was not only urgent but dangerous. Colonel Gorak confirmed that when he spoke both to Biff's mother and his Uncle Charlie. But all agreed that the mission was imperative, and since it was necessary for Biff to accompany the party, the other boys should have their choice in the matter, too.

Their choice was unanimous. They all said they would go. Li and Chuba talked to Biff and told him that. Then Biff introduced Kamuka and Chandra to Chuba; and finally, he had Mike Arista on the line, having him meet both Li and Chuba. It was Uncle Charlie who ended that round robin.

"Let me get my instructions," he insisted, taking

the telephone from the boys at his end, "before the Indian government has to dig another gold mine to pay for this long distance call."

Uncle Charlie not only took instructions; he was filled in on all the details of the Rajah's ruby, otherwise known as the Light of the Lama, as well as Biff's adventures since leaving Calcutta. Uncle Charlie went into all that for the benefit of the breathless listeners, who included his nephew Ted and his niece Monica. Then:

"We're taking off today," Charles Keene stated, "by way of Katmandu, the capital of Nepal. Then a big hop over to Leh. If bad weather delays us, we can meet the party somewhere between Leh and the Tibetan border. They've given me a list of locations where they will stop. So let's get ready to go."

That was meant for Li and Chuba, but Ted and Monica thought that they were included, for they jumped up and were rushing off to pack when their Uncle Charlie called them back.

"No, small fry!" he said. "You're staying here!"

"Oh, no!" the twins wailed in one voice. "We both voted to go!"

"That vote was for teen-agers only," returned Uncle Charlie. "Somebody has to stay here and look after your mother. Besides, the Cessna only carries five passengers and we have four already: Li, Chuba, Muscles, and myself."

"But if we're small fry," argued Monica, "the two of us would only count as one—"

"Or maybe you don't want girls along," inter-

rupted Ted, "so in that case you can take just me."

Monica turned on Ted at that and was pounding him to show how tough her fists could really be, when Uncle Charlie moved in and separated them as he said:

"Break it up! Muscles is so big he counts for two, so that makes five passengers already. Sorry, no more room!"

When they reached the airfield, Muscles had the plane all ready for the flight. The massive mechanic was standing guard and glaring suspiciously at any workers who came near the plane.

"That is Muscles' way," Charles Keene said approvingly. "With an international spy ring haunting an old gold mine and thugs trying to steal a ruby as a gift for the goddess Kali, almost anything could happen to any of us, anywhere!"

Then, with Charles Keene at the controls, the plane was climbing from the runway in the direction of the snow-capped Himalayas, where dozens of magnificent peaks seemed to grow into sight, to match huge Kanchenjunga and even more distant Everest.

The higher the plane rose, the more the mountains loomed above it. Avoiding those vast peaks, Charles Keene worked the plane above valleys and passes that formed openings in the massive barrier. The ranges rose skyward like great steps until the plane reached the fertile Katmandu Valley near the center of Nepal, a great green oasis in a vast desert of rocky crags and the perpetual snow of the surrounding Himalayas.

Katmandu was a colorful city of temples, pagodas,

and palaces that rose from among lesser buildings and great open squares. The altitude was a little more than four thousand feet, and Charles Keene made a landing at the airfield to check on weather reports, while Muscles gave the plane another going over. From there, the plane took off westward, passing south of the great twin peaks of Annapurna and Dhaulagiri, gigantic sentinels twenty miles apart, with a deep valley tapering down to a river gorge between their five-mile summits.

"It's too soon to head north," decided Charles Keene, "even though that gap does look inviting. It would take us into Tibet, and we might have problems picking a course over into Kashmir. We'll do better this way."

This way took them out of Nepal, and soon they were flying over India again. There, Biff's uncle finally swung to the north, and again the Himalayas loomed ahead. Then they were knifing through fleecy clouds at two hundred and fifty miles an hour, straight toward the disputed Tibetan border.

"This course will bring us into Leh," Charles Keene declared, as the clouds began to thicken, "but we'd better get more altitude."

A gigantic mass of solid, snowy white rose through a rift in the clouds. As the plane skimmed over it, they all drew a relieved breath.

"We nearly scraped frosting off cake," Chuba said.

Charles Keene smiled, but a bit grimly, as he studied his chart again. Then:

"If that was Nanda Devi," he declared, "we are

away off course." He turned to Muscles. "Is the altimeter right?" he asked.

"It was when I checked it last."

"Then we aren't climbing as we should."

The plane droned on, in and out of cloud banks, above valleys filled with mist. Fortunately, no more mountains rose into their path, but clouds were thickening up ahead and the plane was not responding properly.

"We're almost over the northern range," Uncle Charlie said. "But tackling those cloud banks would be risky, and turning back would be worse. We'll do better making a forced landing in one of those forgotten valleys."

"Provided the visibility is good enough at landing level," put in Muscles. "We may encounter ground fog."

"That's the chance we take," Uncle Charlie conceded. "But I don't think it has settled deeply yet."

Coolly, Charles Keene zoomed over two low-lying mountain ranges, then banked his plane toward a wide space where a trace of green showed deep beneath the gathering mist. The white blanket thickened as he approached it, and the plane, as it descended, was swallowed completely in those swirling folds. The roar of the motor was muffled; then it, too, faded entirely.

Silence reigned again above the mist-filled valleys of the Himalayas, the strange, mysterious stillness that the mightiest of mountains had known since the dawn of time.

The Caravan Halts

"SO THIS is Srinagar!"

Biff Brewster spoke from the bow of a narrow, rakish craft known as a *shikara*, as two turbaned oarsmen propelled it along the River Jhelum through the heart of Kashmir's capital city. Between Biff and the stern, where both paddlers were seated, was a large canopy mounted on ornamental poles. Reclining beneath it were Chandra, Kamuka, and Mike Arista.

The front of the canopy bore the boat's name, *Happy Daze*, for these gondolas of the Himalayan Venice were particularly popular with American visitors. As they swept along beneath the ancient wooden bridges that spanned the Jehlum, the boys waved to passengers in passing shikaras with signs bearing such varied titles as *Hot Dog*, *The Big Mo*, and *Chattanooga Choo Choo*.

Picturesque buildings flanked both sides of the waterway, and beneath their balconies were native craft called *dungas*, on which whole families lived. Far more pretentious were the lavish houseboats occupied by Europeans and Americans. These were

more in evidence after the shikara brought them to the Dal Gate, the outlet for Dal Lake.

From there, they followed more canals to the lake itself, where they wove among actual floating gardens to the five-mile stretch of open water beyond. Sunset was tingeing Dal Lake with a deep crimson that purpled the blue lake and its surrounding foliage against the magnificient backdrop of the snow-clad Himalayas.

"Fine sunset," Kamuka appraised it. "Much better than on the Hooghly."

"And all we need," commented Biff, studying the mirrored sunset in the placid water, "is for a bore to come roaring down the lake. This water buggy would really wind up in a happy daze."

Even that imaginary menace was ended when they reached their destination, a houseboat named *Pride of the Deodars*. This was a stout ship in its own right, measuring 120 feet from "stem to stern" as Biff put it, with a width or beam of 16 feet. Before taking off from New Delhi, Colonel Gorak had engaged the *Pride of the Deodars* for their overnight stay in Srinagar and had come directly here while the boys were taking their river trip.

Smilingly, the colonel showed them through an actual floating mansion, for the *Pride*, as the boys promptly called it, had a huge living room and a sizable dining room, each with a fireplace, plus three bedrooms with private baths. A native chef served a tasty dinner from the ample kitchen. After the meal, the boys went to the living room. They were seated

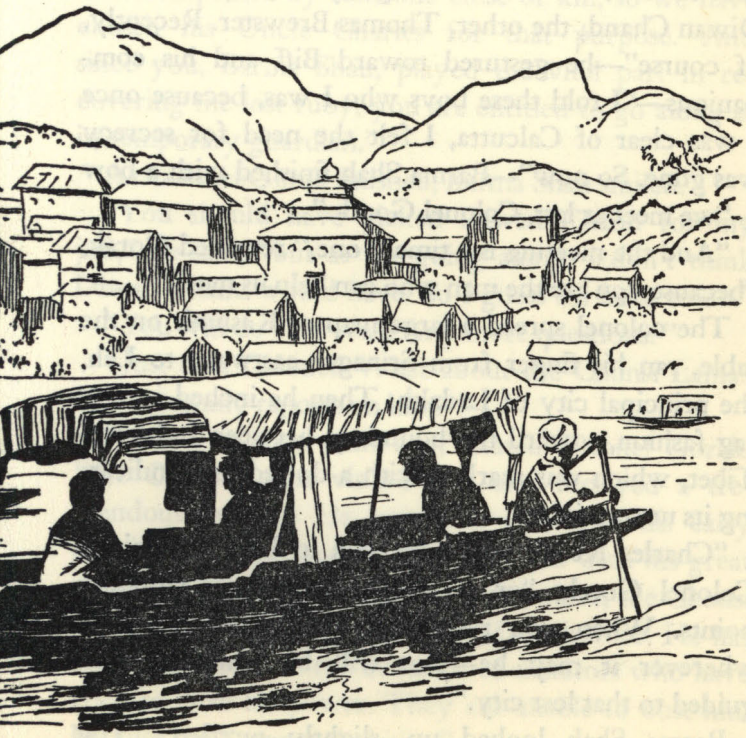
in front of the fireplace, when a light glimmered cautiously from the water close by, and they heard a shikara scrape alongside the *Pride*.

"Barma Shah," stated Colonel Gorak. "I contacted him at the address in Simla." Gorak turned to Biff. "I have never met him, so you can introduce us."

When Barma Shah entered, he was wearing his beret and tinted glasses, as excellent a disguise as ever, for when he removed them, his complexion changed in color and his face seemed to broaden, probably be-

cause of his widespread ears. His high forehead and short-clipped hair were deceptive, too, for the beret had hidden them well. Colonel Gorak nodded his approval.

"I can understand why you have managed to stay undercover," Gorak declared. "I have dozens of reports from men who have contacted you at one time or another"—the colonel gestured to an attaché case on the table—"but not one could give more than a vague description of you."



"Unfortunately, most of those who knew me best are gone," returned Barma Shah, in a regretful tone. "They were marked for death, as I have been."

"I know that," nodded Colonel Gorak. "All of you were in constant danger from all sides when you tried to quell those riots between rival factions, especially in Calcutta."

"The danger still is great," declared Barma Shah, "and that is why I show myself so seldom. During the past year or more, only two men really met me face to face, so far as learning my identity. One was Diwan Chand; the other, Thomas Brewster. Recently, of course"—he gestured toward Biff and his companions—"I told these boys who I was, because once I was clear of Calcutta, I felt the need for secrecy was gone. So now"—Barma Shah finished with a bow—"we meet at last, Colonel Gorak."

"And the meeting is a timely one," returned Gorak, "because you are the man who can help us most."

The colonel spread a large map of Kashmir on the table, ran his finger from Srinagar eastward to Leh, the principal city of Ladakh. Then he inched it, zigzag fashion, toward the boundary between India and Tibet, which was marked with a dotted line, indicating its uncertainty.

"Charles Keene will meet you in Leh," explained Colonel Gorak, "or at one of your later stopping points. When you reach the vicinity of Chonsi—wherever it may be—you will be contacted and guided to that lost city."

Barma Shah looked up, slightly puzzled. "You

aren't coming with us, Colonel Gorak?" he asked.

"No. This is not a military mission, nor even an official expedition. Mr. Brewster went there on his own and personally promised to deliver the Rajah's ruby to the Chonsi Lama, once the gem was found. Since the descendants of the Rajah were supposed to deliver it to the successor of the Lama, tradition demands that Mr. Brewster's promise be fulfilled by his son.

"Again, in keeping with tradition, the boy should be accompanied by someone close of kin, so we have chosen his Uncle Charles for that purpose. And since you, Barma Shah, played the vital part in recovering the lost ruby, you are entitled to go along as its temporary guardian."

As Colonel Gorak finished, Barma Shah smiled.

"You should have picked Diwan Chand for my job," he said, "but as for going along, I don't think Diwan Chand would have. So I guess I'll have to do."

"You will do very well. Any more questions?"

"Just one, Colonel. What about the Chonsi Lama? Have you any reports on him?"

"Nearly twenty years ago," stated Colonel Gorak, "the Chonsi Lama visited Leh and received a tremendous ovation. He was then a man in his early thirties and impressed all who met him with his great vigor and his keen mind. In the years since, the Chonsi Lama has preserved the balance of the border. He has refused to listen to the demands of dictators who have tried to curb his power. They are unable to oust him because they cannot find him."

"And all the while his influence has increased?" Barma Shah inquired.

"Yes. Today, the Chonsi Lama is regarded as one of the wisest men in the East and, without a doubt, the most mysterious. No one has seen him since that time in Leh, but he has been heard from often, and his well-weighed decisions have increased his fame. Now in his early fifties, he is probably at the peak of his career—that is, if Lamas have careers. When one dies, his spirit is supposed to be reincarnated in an infant born at that same time, who then continues on as a Living Buddha."

Biff and the other boys wanted to hear more on that intriguing subject, but Barma Shah asked:

"Will anyone block us between Leh and Chonsi?"

"One man will if he can," returned Gorak grimly. "That is Bela Kron, who heads the international spy ring. Have you ever run across him here in India?"

"No, but I would like to." Barma Shah gritted his teeth and clenched his fists. "I would repay him in kind for the way he tortured some of my friends."

"I know." Colonel Gorak tapped the attaché case significantly. "The reports are all in here. But would you recognize Bela Kron if you saw him?"

"No, because I could not possibly have met him. Brewster may have, around those mines in Bildapore, but Bela Kron would have been very wary, any time he came to Calcutta."

That ended the conference for the evening. Tingling with excitement, the boys found it difficult to go to sleep, even in the luxurious houseboat. When they

finally did drop off, the night seemed very short indeed, for Colonel Gorak woke them early for their morning flight to Leh.

The five-hundred-mile trip was interesting, for below, the boys saw samples of the rugged terrain that they would have to cover later on. The nearest thing to a road was a crude trail that led through mountain passes twelve thousand feet in altitude, where the plane flew low between the hemming Himalaya ranges. There were occasional squatty villages and Buddhist monasteries perched high upon the mountainsides. These gave an idea of what Chonsi would be like if ever they found the place.

The immediate objective was Leh, and it proved interesting when they landed there. Though a town of only a few thousand inhabitants, its bazaars showed a mingling of many races including tribes in outlandish costumes, for this was the trade center where goods came in from Tibet by caravan. Biff and his companions found the equipment ready and the arrangements all made for their trek to the border. But Charles Keene and his Cessna had not yet arrived.

For two full days they waited, with the strain continually increasing. The only news was a roundabout report from Katmandu, stating that the Cessna had put down there and then resumed its flight, on the very day that Biff and his companions had flown from New Delhi up to Srinagar. On the third day, Colonel Gorak, who had come along this far, decided that the caravan must start. Barma Shah agreed.

"There is still a chance that your uncle's plane made

a safe landing," Gorak told Biff. "But by now he will suppose that you have left Leh, so there is no need of staying here."

"In fact, it would be a mistake," declared Barma Shah, "for your uncle has our schedule and may be expecting us at one of the stopping posts. We are already a day late, but the first two stages are short, so we can make them in a single day."

Paced by plodding, heavily laden yaks, they made the required distance by nightfall. Their course was toward the glistening mountains to the south, but the whiteness that worried Biff was not the snow upon the Himalayan summits. The thick clouds surrounding the lower levels were the menace. They filled the passes and the valleys beyond, the only places where the plane could have made a landing.

By morning the clouds were heavier still, and Barma Shah was anxious to make an early start because of the threatening snow. Biff pleaded with him to wait, so they did for another hour, studying the increasing snow clouds.

"It's no use," Barma Shah decided finally. "We can hardly see the slopes now. Anyone coming through those passes would have to turn back."

Biff nodded hopelessly. But as he took one last look through a pair of field glasses, he was sure he detected motion in the distant haze. Then, against the snowy background, he saw three figures. One paused as they struggled forward and waved his arms in a characteristic gesture.

Excitedly, Biff exclaimed, "Uncle Charlie!"

XVI

The Bamboo Bridge

BIFF and the three boys with him started forward on the run to meet Charles Keene and his companions. They soon saw that one of the pair was Li, and since the other was about his size, it only took one guess for Biff to name him: "Chuba!" But by the time the two groups met, Biff had another name in mind as well. The first words he put were:

"Where's Muscles? Wasn't he along with you?"

"Muscles is all right," Charles Keene assured him. "We are, too, but we had to speed up our pace the last few miles, otherwise we wouldn't have made it. When I get a cup of hot coffee, I'll tell you all about it."

Li and Chuba were just too winded to talk at all. When they reached the caravan, Barma Shah decided to delay the start until they had rested. That gave Charles Keene time to tell their story. He related how clouds had enveloped their plane high in the Himalayas.

"Rather than hit a mountain," he said, "we chanced

a landing in a valley. Fortunately it was a deep one, and the fog hadn't fully settled. All of a sudden, green fields smacked right up at us. We banged up the plane some, but not too badly. What happened next was the odd part."

Charles Keene paused to drink half his cup of coffee in one long, grateful swallow. Meanwhile, Li and Chuba couldn't wait to pick the story up from there.

"A lot of natives wearing goat skins came rushing up to the plane," declared Li. "We thought they were going to mob us."

"They were shouting *'Yeti! Yeti!'* over and over," put in Chuba, "but before we could find out what they meant, Muscles went after them. You should have seen them run."

Charles Keene laid aside his empty cup.

"Later, they came creeping back," he said, "and we made friends with them. So we didn't ask what they meant by shouting—"

He stopped suddenly, as Barma Shah made frantic gestures for silence. A Ladakhi porter was standing by, staring with dark, narrowed eyes. Barma Shah told the man to bring some more hot coffee. Then, when he was gone, Barma Shah confided:

"Don't mention the word Yeti to these people. You have heard of the giant ape-man of the Himalayas, haven't you? The creature they call the Abominable Snowman? That's their name for it: Yeti—"

"I remember now!" exclaimed Charles Keene. "I was sure I'd heard the word before. But I thought that yarn was spiked long ago."

"Not in these mountains," rejoined Barma Shah. "Here in Ladakh, as well as Kashmir, Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal, Tibet, and even as far away as Yarkand, the Yeti is very real. The natives will run away if they even think such a creature is around."

"And we thought they meant the plane!" exclaimed Li.

"Yes, because we came down from the sky like a big bird," added Chuba. "Bigger than they ever saw before."

"They may have blamed the Yeti for bringing such a monster," commented Barma Shah. "But here comes the porter with the coffee. So let us avoid the word from now on."

"But where is Muscles?" queried Biff.

"Back in the valley, looking after the plane," explained his uncle. "Some of the tribesmen—*Sherpas* they call themselves—guided us over to the mountain pass and then returned to their valley. We miscalculated slightly or we would have been here sooner."

Despite the delay, the caravan completed its next stage ahead of the impending snowstorm. The patient yaks, creatures that resemble both the ox and the American buffalo, with long hair like the fleece of a sheep, responded to continued prodding as though they recognized the need for hurry. Tikse, the chief porter and head yak driver, had a comment on that score.

"Listen and you hear yak grunt," he told the boys. "That means two things."

"And what are those?" asked Biff.

"One thing, yak like what happen, yes. Other thing, yak do not like what happen, no."

"And how," queried Mike, "do you tell the grunts apart?"

"No way to tell," replied Tikse. "Yak grunt the same exactly, whichever way he feel. But it is important just the same."

"And what makes it so important," demanded Li, "if you don't know the difference?"

"You do know the difference," returned Tikse. "When yak give grunt, he feel one way or other, maybe both. When yak do not give grunt, yak do not care."

"But why," asked Chuba, "should yaks feel both good and bad?"

"These yaks feel good," explained Tikse, "because they know they get to shelter ahead of snow. They feel bad because we make them hurry. So they say both things with one grunt. Simple."

It looked simple indeed when they reached the day's goal, a small patch of grazing ground where dried grass spread to the foot of rocky slopes. There were stone huts for the members of the party and similar shelters for the yaks. The reason stones had been used in the construction was because there were plenty of them lying around; and nothing else. The roofs of the buildings were made of rough boards, covered with thatched leaves. They weren't nailed down because they didn't have to be. The builders had simply placed big stones on the roofs.

The boys turned in early and slept late, snug in

their sleeping bags and shoulder to shoulder in their huts. In the morning it took three of them to ram the door open, the snow was so deep. But the yaks were up, ready and grunting—some because they liked snow; others because they hated it.

The yaks pulled the party through. They bulldozed their way through the snow, chest deep, clearing it like living snowplows, so that the people had no difficulty following them. Oddly, as the trail climbed higher, it led to barren ground, totally free from snow. Apparently, the storm clouds hadn't managed to gain that altitude.

Early that afternoon, the party halted at a roaring mountain stream and stared at the remnants of a crude wooden bridge that had been washed away by the flood. Sadly, Tikse petted one yak after another, while the porters relieved the stolid beasts of their burdens. The boys watched Tikse turn the yaks over to two other Ladakhis, who promptly drove them off along the trail. Barma Shah explained the situation.

"We'll have to make a footbridge," he stated, "before the water rises too high. So Tikse is sending the yaks on to another shelter. From now on, the porters will carry our packs."

All the while, Biff could hear a chopping sound from a short way up the narrow, turbulent stream. There was a sudden crash, and a tree came toppling down to bridge the raging torrent. Chandra appeared from the brush, carrying a heavy hand-axe.

"Bridge already set," reported Chandra. "It just needs one thing more—"

A dozen steps and Biff was over

"It needs much more." The interruption came from a squatty, broadly built porter named Hurdu, as he tested the tree with a clumsy foot. "We need ten more trees like this."

"We need a rail for the bridge," declared Chandra calmly. "Can somebody bring me a rope?"

Biff supplied a rope, and Chandra hitched one end around a tree. Like a monkey, he scrambled across the fallen tree, carrying the free end of the rope with him. A single slip and Chandra would have gone into the flood, which probably would have pleased Hurdu, who was watching intently. But Chandra was across in no time and promptly hitched the rope to a tree on the opposite bank, drawing it taut as he did.

"Now, walk across log bridge," called Chandra, "and hold on to rope rail."

Biff shouldered a pack and followed instructions, keeping his eyes fixed straight ahead, not on the furious current, which would have distracted him. With one hand on the rope, it was simple to steady himself while he advanced one foot, then the other. A dozen steps and he was over. Now the other boys were following his example. That was all the porters needed. They hoisted their full burdens, eighty pounds to a man, and stalked across Chandra's simple bridge in regular procession.

Charles Keene and Barma Shah followed, as did Tikse and Hurdu, though the last two exchanged glares before they started and after they had crossed. Now that the yaks had gone their way, a dispute appeared to be in the making as to who was the chief

guide of the party. Both Tikse and Hurdu wanted that honor.

The narrow path made a steep ascent up the side of a high cliff, and before the porters were out of sight of Chandra's crude bridge, they saw the surging stream carry it away. Time had been the all-important factor, where that crossing was concerned. But an hour later, the party came to something much more formidable.

The trail swung along the fringe of a tremendous, steep-walled gorge a thousand feet in depth and a hundred or more across. Down below, a river thundered like a hungry dragon, ready to devour any human prey. Chandra was pleased to see that this chasm was already bridged, for he could have done nothing with his hand-axe.

The bridge was of a suspension type, so crude and flimsy of construction that it seemed to hover in mid-air. Yet it evidently was strong enough, for Barma Shah, who was up in front, started across without hesitation. Tikse and Hurdu were close behind him, followed by the long procession of porters with their heavy packs. As Biff paused to look for the other boys, he found Chuba close beside him. As usual, Chuba had a saying to fit the situation.

"Tikse and Hurdu agree on something at last," declared Chuba. "Wise man never argue when it prove another man right."

"You've got something there," laughed Biff, as he watched Tikse and Hurdu practically crowd each other across the bridge. "Neither could afford to

hesitate, or he'd be admitting that the other was boss."

"From the look of that bridge," observed Li, "both were lucky to get across. The same goes for us—if we make it."

Considering that the bridge's cables were composed of twisted strands of bamboo and rattan, with hanging vines dangling like ropes to support the roadway, Li had a point. But the other boys didn't agree. They had seen and crossed many such primitive bridges: Chuba in Burma, Chandra in India, Kamuka in Brazil, and Mike in Mexico. Though the porters crossed at a safe distance apart, they didn't begin to tax the bridge to its capacity.

That was proven when the boys reached the bridge and saw that its runway, fashioned from strips of bamboo laid crosswise, was wide enough to drive a yak across. As the boys crossed the bridge two abreast, Biff spoke to Chandra, who was beside him.

"Now I see why Hurdu wanted to chop down more trees back at the little stream. We could have brought the yaks along. Why wasn't Tikse in favor of that?"

"I saw Tikse pet the yaks and say good-by," returned Chandra. "He made grunts, like yak, saying he was both glad and sorry. Sorry because yaks had to go. Glad because it gave jobs to porters instead."

"You're right!" exclaimed Biff. "Colonel Gorak said the bearers were not to receive full pay until they actually took over."

The tremendous roar of water echoed up from the steep-walled gorge, drowning further conversation until the boys were across. It might have been imagi-

nation, but Biff felt that the bridge quivered as he left it, so he turned to look back while Chandra, still beside him, was laying his pack on solid ground. They had come between a pair of upright posts that served as tower for the bridge; now they were close by the big stakes to which the rope cables were moored. There, porters were stacking their packs by dozens and sitting down to rest.

There were still several porters on the bridge, all well spaced. Behind them came Li and Chuba, for those two boys had stayed back to wait for Charles Keene, who was bringing up the rear. Biff's uncle had taken on that duty to "keep the parade moving" as he styled it, which meant that he had been encouraging straggling porters in his own cheery, breezy way.

Li and Chuba were past the halfway mark and Uncle Charlie was almost there when Biff saw the swaying bridge give a sudden shudder. Biff thought for an instant that it was an earth tremor. Then he noticed that the porters near him were chatting, quite unconcerned. Biff gave a warning shout, too late.

With a snap like a rifle report, the rope parted from the stake at Biff's right. With it, the entire cable slipped on that side of the bridge, tilting the runway downward. In a single second, Charles Keene, Li, Chuba, and a pair of porters were sprawling on the slippery bamboo slats, which had suddenly become a chute to certain doom in the abyss below!

XVII

The Monster of the Mountains

IN THE harrowing moments that followed, Biff saw two shapes go slithering off the slanted bridge and continue spinning, tumbling in huddled helpless fashion into the gaping jaws of the roaring gorge. Biff shut his eyes as they disappeared, and his mind flashed back to those tiny figures that he had seen against the snowy background of the mountain pass.

Uncle Charlie, Li, and Chuba. The boys were two of a size, like those two forms that had just plunged from the collapsing bridge. So they must be Li and Chuba—or else the two porters. But no, not the porters; those somersaulting shapes weren't big enough. Biff tightened his fists grimly as he opened his eyes for one last hopeless look.

Biff was right: It wasn't the porters.

At the first warning quiver of the bridge, they had dropped their heavy burdens and made a desperate dive for safety. Nearly across, first one, then the other, had managed to grab the high edge of the canted runway and scramble to the ground beyond.

But as Biff looked past them, his eyes opened really wide.

It wasn't Li or Chuba either!

Both boys were still there, near the center of the bridge, with Uncle Charlie!

The moment the bridge had tilted one way and they had felt themselves sliding with it, all three had made a frantic grab in the other direction. Instinctively, they had gripped the upper side and the slender grass ropes that supported it. They were still hanging on.

What Biff had seen tumble into the gorge were the bulky packs that the porters had flung aside. Those bulging burdens, when falling, had looked exactly like a pair of huddled humans. Now, Uncle Charlie and the two boys were lightening weight by letting their own packs follow the path of the others.

That still didn't guarantee them safety. The whole weight of the bridge was now swaying on a single rope cable. Sooner or later it was sure to snap; then all hope of rescue would be gone. Now, chunks of the runway were breaking loose from the dangling ropes, which no longer bore their proportionate shares of the weight. That produced a new dilemma.

It was impossible for Uncle Charlie, Li, and Chuba to work their way along that upper edge, because of the gaps. They would have to reach the one remaining cable, climb it to the top of the tower post and come down to the ground. Li and Chuba might manage it; but not Charles Keene, with all his weight.

Chandra had the answer. He had brought along

the rope from his log bridge. He tossed one end to Biff, saying, "Hang on tight!" Then, carrying the other end, Chandra scrambled up the lone cable and practically slid from the post top out to where Li and Chuba clung. There, Chandra, Li, and Chuba tied their rope end to the cable; while Biff, Mike, and Kamuka hauled the rope taut and hitched the other end around the tower post.

That filled the gaps along the level route to safety. Chandra went first, pausing to tie dangling liana strands to the new rope to keep it from sagging. Li and Chuba followed, stopping to wait for Charles Keene, even when he twisted one arm in the rope and waved them on with his other hand. If Biff's uncle tired, they hoped to help him; but what Uncle Charlie lacked in agility, he made up for in endurance.

After minutes that proved long and nerve-racking for Biff and his watching companions, the other boys reached solid ground with Charles Keene right behind them. A moment later, Biff and the rest were swarming around Uncle Charlie and congratulating him, while Barma Shah spoke approvingly.

"That was very good, indeed. And just in time, too. The wind is getting brisker from the gorge. What is left of the bridge will soon be gone."

At a combined order from Tikse and Hurdu, the bearers gathered their packs. Then they were on their way again. As they veered away from the gorge, Biff took a last look back. The remains of the bridge were swinging like a hammock now, its single strand due to snap at any moment.

Chandra, who was walking beside Biff, touched his arm. "The rope, Biff," he said in a low voice. "Somebody cut it!"

Biff stared at him. "Are you sure?" he gasped. When Chandra nodded, Biff said soberly, "Then that means there's an enemy right in our own party."

That evening, when they pitched their tents in the shelter of some trees on the rim of a rugged valley, Charles Keene remarked:

"Losing a few packs didn't hurt us, because we were short on porters anyway."

"Short on porters?" inquired Barma Shah. "How?"

"We had sixty yesterday morning, but there were only fifty-four when I counted them as they crossed the log bridge. That's why I brought up the rear, to see that no more of them skipped."

That news brought a grim expression to Barma Shah's face. In response, he said:

"They may have heard our talk of Yeti. What is more, I saw some big tracks in the snow before we broke camp yesterday. I obliterated them, but perhaps some of the porters saw them first."

That night it snowed again, though only lightly. In the morning, Biff awoke to hear the camp babbling with excitement. He crawled from his sleeping bag and emerged from the tent, where he promptly ran into Chandra, who told him:

"Yeti tracks again. Hurdu found them on the hill."

Biff joined Charles Keene and Barma Shah up near some barren rocks. The tracks were much larger than a man's foot, but clumsy and roughly formed. They

led in from the rocks, then back again, as though some creature had come down from the craggy hill toward the camp, only to return to its lair.

Some of the Ladakhi bearers were gabbing among themselves and repeating, "Yeti—Yeti," much too often, as they walked along beside the big footprints and compared them with their own smaller tracks. Back at camp, Barma Shah conferred with Tikse, who gave the porters a pep-talk in a mixture of Hindi and Ladakhi. They responded in grunts of half-agreement as they gathered up their packs.

"Those sound like yak grunts," declared Chuba. "Good and bad. They don't want to go along, but anyway, they go."

"That is right," stated Chandra, who had caught the meaning of the speech. "Tikse says they have to go along because they can't go back, as there is no bridge across the gorge."

That night, the porters pitched their tents much closer together when they camped. There was another light snow, and in the morning Hurdu found new Yeti tracks beside a rocky slope nearby. Charles Keene was frankly skeptical about them.

"Anybody could have made them with a piece of brushwood," Biff's uncle declared, "or in half a dozen other ways. But I guess Tikse can't convince his crowd of that."

"Tikse thinks they are Yeti tracks himself," returned Barma Shah. "That is the real trouble."

All day the Ladakhi porters kept watching the barren ground above the tree line, for that was the high

altitude at which the Yeti supposedly dwelled. They quickened their pace and reached the next campsite well before dusk. There, trouble seemed over, for this was a valley where two trails crossed, and already a nomadic tribe was camped there. They greeted the party from Leh and gladly sold them fresh provisions.

That night, there was music and mirth around the campfires. The morning dawned crisp but pleasant, for there was no sign of any snow. Nor was there any sign of Tikse and his Ladakhi porters. They had pulled out at dawn, taking the other trail the long way back to Leh, leaving only Hurdu and a dozen others who were not Ladakhi.

That automatically promoted Hurdu to chief guide, and when he suggested hiring some of the nomad tribesmen as porters, Barma Shah favored the idea, but asked for approval from Charles Keene, as joint leader of the expedition. Biff's uncle was all for Hurdu's suggestion.

"They look to me like Sherpas," he declared. "Like those friendly chaps we met in the valley where we landed our plane."

"They are not Sherpas," put in Chuba politely. "I listen to their talk, Sahib Keene. They call themselves *Changpas*. They do not come from the south, but from the north."

"That means that they are not Nepalese," stated Barma Shah, "but Tibetans. They are accustomed to these high altitudes perhaps better than those who live in Ladakh or Nepal. What is more"—he lowered his

voice—"they have probably heard less about the Yeti."

"Then let's hire them quickly," returned Charles Keene, with a knowing smile, "before they can change their minds."

Hurdu hired the Changpa bearers, and the march was resumed. But the nomads, though sturdier than the old crew from Leh, lacked their steady-going qualities. They paused frequently to rest and eat, even hinting that they might drop their packs and quit. So Barma Shah told Hurdu to cut the day's trek short as soon as they reached a suitable campsite.

That went on for three days, which pleased Biff and the other boys, as it gave them more time to roam at large. They had found little to talk about with the porters from Leh, but this Changpa crew were mostly hunters. They had brought throwing spears as well as bows and arrows, and at every halt, they let the boys try the weapons.

On the fourth morning, Biff awoke to find more snow on the ground. Nobody else was up, for the carefree Changpas were late risers. Glancing off beyond the camp, Biff saw something that riveted him. Going back into the tent, Biff wakened the nearest boy, who happened to be Chandra. Motioning for silence, Biff whispered: "Yeti tracks! Come on!"

Chandra came, bringing his trusty hand-axe. Biff nodded approval and promptly "borrowed" a throwing spear that was standing outside a Changpa tent. He then led Chandra to the first of the marks that he had noticed in the snow. They looked like footprints

and big ones, half the size of snowshoe tracks. Breathless, Chandra gestured back toward the camp.

"Maybe we better call others?"

"Not yet," returned Biff. "Let's see where these lead. Then we can plan ahead, before everybody gets excited."

The tracks led up the slope, but instead of ending there, they followed a snow-covered ledge. Beyond that was a huge, chunky rock, and as Biff glanced in that direction, he saw a great tawny figure with a shock of thick, black hair, as it bounded from cover.

Then it was gone, among another cluster of rocks. Biff was after it, beckoning Chandra along, and they saw the thing again, as it sprang to another snowy ledge. There it dropped to all fours, and by the time the boys reached the ledge, it was gone again, but its footprints showed in the patchy snow. The two boys passed a slight turn where the rocks rose like jagged steps, tufted with snow. As Chandra started in that direction, Biff noticed an arched gap in the jagged wall that rose beside the ledge itself.

Biff turned and called, "Wait, Chandra. There's a cave here—maybe that's where he went—"

Chandra looked back, and his face froze with horror. He was too startled even to shout a warning, but the look in his eyes, which were staring straight past Biff, told enough. Instinctively, Biff wheeled about, then recoiled as he turned his eyes upward.

From the cleft in the rocky wall loomed a tremendous hulk of reddish brown. Tiny eyes were glaring above wide-open, long-toothed jaws, while mas-

sive, sharp-clawed paws clamped downward, inward, toward the boy's dodging form.

Biff Brewster was all but in the grip of a gigantic Tibetan bear, one of the most dangerous creatures that roved those rocky heights!

XVIII

The Frozen Waterfall

ALL that saved Biff at that moment was the Changpa spear that he had snatched from outside a tent. He had the weapon in his hand, and as he dodged, he jabbed the spear point at the creature from the cave. It was puny compared to the bear's bulk, but it bothered the big beast. Clumsily, the bear batted aside the jabs, and that diverted its action.

Biff now had time to dive away. He flung the spear as he went, but it flew wide. Hardly had it clattered on the rocks before another weapon whizzed past the bear's head: Chandra's hand-axe. Like Biff, Chandra timed his throw too late. The bear was already dropping on all fours, about to lope after Biff. Biff saw that in a glance and began thinking fast.

Bears, though clumsy, could move swiftly and would attack if angered, which this one evidently was. Tibetan bears were death on yaks and sheep; that Biff had also heard. Maybe they'd keep coming after them on ledges like this, so there was no use acting like a sheep or a yak. Biff halted suddenly and

flattened himself against the rocky wall, ready to reverse direction if the bear came bounding past.

On the contrary, if it reared, Biff intended to be off again; and while waiting that moment of decision, he took a quick look down toward the campsite. That proved smart indeed. Instead of the area being all but deserted, with everyone asleep, it literally teemed with action. Uncle Charlie and Barma Shah were coming up the slope armed with rifles and followed by half a dozen Changpa tribesmen, all with bows and arrows.

All the other boys were coming, too, apparently shouting as loudly as they could, but the wind was against them, which was why Biff hadn't heard them. They were gesturing, though, and that he understood. Wildly, all were waving for him to keep going along the ledge. That Biff would have done anyway, for just now, the bear had arrived and was rearing for another lunge. So Biff took off again, hoping that the ledge would lead somewhere.

That wasn't necessary. From behind him came the *ping* of bullets as they hit the ledge, followed by the boom of the actual gunshots from below. Biff darted another quick look and saw arrows coming down from the sky, with the rearing bear as their target. The bear hadn't budged from its last position, except to set itself up for the marksmen. Suddenly bristling with arrows, it toppled, rolled sideways, and fell from sight over the ledge.

Everybody took credit for the kill, which they had a right to do. Uncle Charlie had fired half a dozen shots and was sure that at least two had landed. Barma

Shah quietly showed Biff his rifle, which still had a special gadget fitted above the barrel.

"This time," Barma Shah confided, "it *was* a telescopic sight. I only use the flashlight beam at night."

As for the Changpa marksmen, there were six of them, and there were six arrows in the dead bear. They knew which arrow was whose, because all had identifying marks. They chattered among themselves, each claiming that his shaft had been the best. They were still at it after their comrades had carved the bear into steaks for the evening dinner at the next campsite.

That pleased Barma Shah, because nobody was interested in the Yeti tracks any more. He mentioned this fact to Hurdu, who interpreted it to the Changpas thus:

"You see what fools the Ladakhi are? Day after day, they see tracks in the snow and think they are Yeti footprints. Instead, they are just bear tracks. The big bear followed, hoping people have yaks that bear can kill and eat. Instead, people kill bear and eat it. But people who kill bear are Changpas, not Ladakhi!"

When they stopped for a noonday meal, the Changpa bowmen were still arguing whose arrow had killed the big bear. While the other boys were watching and quietly getting a wallop out of the pantomime, Chandra drew Biff aside and asked:

"Who do you think really killed the bear?"

"Uncle Charlie fired a lot of shots," replied Biff, "And he may have made some hits. After all, we didn't dig the bullets out of the carcass. But I know—and

you know—that Barma Shah is a terrific marksman—"

"This is true," interposed Chandra. "But Barma Shah did not kill the bear. The Yeti did."

Biff stared amazed.

"We saw Yeti," said Chandra. "Didn't we?"

"We saw something go hopping up to the ledge," conceded Biff, "but when we got there, out popped the big bear."

"From the cave, yes, but I saw Yeti keep going up by rocks above."

"So you said, Chandra. But are you sure?"

"Sure I am sure. Because the number one shot that killed the bear, it came from up there. Afterward, there was much shooting. But first, the bear had gone like this."

Chandra gave a perfect imitation of the way the bear had stiffened on the cliff. So Biff decided not to argue it.

"You may be right," he told Chandra, "but let's keep it to ourselves. The Yeti is supposed to be right smart, maybe more man than ape. But to class him as a expert rifleman, well, people just wouldn't go for it."

"You go for it, Biff?"

"I might go for anything, Chandra."

Biff let it go at that, because his own recollections of what had happened on the ledge were somewhat confused, so he could allow for a few mistakes on Chandra's part. Besides, there were more important things to think about. The most important of all was brought up in an odd way when they pitched camp late that same afternoon. Biff heard Li and Kamuka

begin one of their old arguments, while the other boys gleefully listened in.

"Well, Kamuka," commented Li in an indulgent tone, "now that you're high in the Himalayas, how do the Andes stack up?"

"Still bigger," returned Kamuka. "Anyway, they look bigger. That's what's most important."

Kamuka looked for someone to agree, and he received an approving nod from Chuba.

"But there are things here that you won't find in the Andes," Li went on. "For instance"—he caught himself when Biff gave him a warning glance. Instead of mentioning Yetis, Li made a quick switch. "For instance, we have Lamas. You don't have people like that in the Andes."

"Sure we do," rejoined Kamuka. "Only they don't look like people. They look like yaks."

That brought a laugh from Biff, in which Mike joined. Chandra and Chuba were still puzzled, so Biff explained:

"Li means a Lama, spelled with one 'L' like Li. The Lamas are important people. We are on our way to see one now. But Kamuka is talking about llamas, spelled with a double 'l.' They are animals that carry packs in the Andes, as yaks do here."

Biff left it to Mike to go into further details on the subject while he went over to talk to Uncle Charlie and Barma Shah. Biff put a simple question.

"How are we going to find Chonsi?" Biff asked them. "When will we hear from the Grand Lama, the wisest man in the East?"

"I don't know," began Barma Shah, "unless—"

His eyes narrowed as he spoke. He was looking off toward the nearest mountain pass, and Biff, following his gaze, saw a tiny figure coming toward them at a jog-trot.

"What is it?" Biff asked anxiously. "Not—not a Yeti?"

"No, no." Barma Shah had raised a pair of binoculars and was studying the approaching man. "It is a *longompa*, a special kind of runner, who carries messages from one Lama to another. A longompa can keep up that pace all day."

"And he may have a message for us?"

"Very possibly."

The rangy longompa never slackened speed until he pulled into the camp. There, in some uncanny fashion, he picked out the leaders of the party. But when he approached Barma Shah and Charles Keene, he did not hand them the envelope he carried. Instead, he gave it to Biff. Then, with a faraway stare, the runner started off again, oblivious to everything —including the weather, for despite the freezing temperature, he wore only a simple goat skin and a pair of open sandals.

Biff opened the envelope and brought out a sheet of parchment which proved to be a map. He showed it to Uncle Charlie and Barma Shah. Together, they studied it in the firelight, for it was now dusk. The map puzzled them completely until Charles Keene declared: "I don't get it. Somebody has drawn what looks like a streak of lightning—"

"That's it! The Place of Living Thunder!" Barma Shah exclaimed.

He brought out another map and spread it in the firelight. It showed the whole course that the party had followed. Near the present campsite was a zig-zag line, exactly like the one on the parchment, but on a smaller scale.

"It is a chasm a mile deep," explained Barma Shah, "but only half that distance across. Nobody has ever gone there, because it is supposed to be impassable." He traced a dotted line on the longompa's chart. "It must lead to the Lost City of Chonsi. No wonder no one has ever found it! We'll start for there tomorrow."

They were off to an early start the next morning and soon were among scenes of grandeur that surpassed any so far encountered. Narrow valleys filled with odd, colorful flowers formed a contrast to the snow-topped peaks that loomed high above. Then, abruptly, the trail reached the brim of a deep, granite-walled canyon. Nearby was a cluster of trees indicated on the parchment map. A dotted line began from there, so the party moved into the grove. There they were halted by a big rock until the boys probed the underbrush around it and found stone steps leading downward.

Soon, the whole procession was following a dizzy trail chiseled in the canyon wall. Barma Shah had been right regarding its depth: it was at least a mile and perhaps more. The vast gulch followed a zigzag as shown on the map, and as they steadily descended,

the brim of the gorge was totally lost from view, due to the narrowing of the walls.

Then, the zigzag sharpened, and on their own side of the gorge, they saw a fascinating sight. Through an opening in the granite poured what looked like a mammoth waterfall, except that it was utterly motionless. At the bottom, half a mile beneath, was a vast, glassy mass, pock-marked by thousands of huge stones.

"An icefall!" exclaimed Charles Keene. "A stream of water, frozen solid, pouring down to a glacier below!"

As he spoke, they saw a chunk of ice and rock drop from the brink and slide out along the graceful, frozen curve until it dropped straight down and struck the glacier. Then came a rising echo that reverberated through the gorge like a long roll of thunder. When the sound finally died away, Barma Shah said coolly:

"That is why they call it the Place of Living Thunder. People have heard that roar from the brink above, but we are the first to see what caused it—except for those who live in the valley."

Their course brought them to the huge icefall. This time Charles Keene and Barma Shah led the way together, followed by Hurdu and the Tibetan bearers, with Biff and the boys bringing up the rear. The path seemed a very safe one, being hewn in the solid rock. Granite steps took them upward to the overhanging curve of the giant icefall. Above that, a bridge of large steppingstones crossed the whitish flowing mass.

Biff, in the lead, leaped to the first stone and felt it

quiver. He should have turned back, but instead, he tried to jump on to the next. The first stone suddenly went from under him, spilling Biff backward. Mike, who had reached the top of the steps, grabbed for Biff's hand and caught it with both of his own. Then Mike was swept off balance by the force of Biff's slide. Both would have gone skimming over the brink, except that Chuba and Kamuka, coming next, were in time to catch Mike's ankles and hold them.

They hadn't the strength to pull the pair back, and Biff, from his precarious position, realized why. That curving brink of perpetual ice was so smooth that it offered nothing in the way of a hold, not even the slightest amount of friction. Slowly, surely, the drag would bring all four along, unless someone's hold gave out.

In any case, Biff Brewster would be the first to slide out over that fatal curve and plunge the half mile to the glacier below!

XIX

The Lost City

FROM his hopeless perch, Biff heard Kamuka and Chuba shouting up above. "Come on, you fellows!" they yelled. "Lend a hand!" They were calling to Li and Chandra, who were still coming up the granite steps, but it was useless. Biff and Mike represented too much dead weight, even for all four.

Mike had Biff's wrist in a powerful grip. They were face to face as Biff looked up and said, "You'll have to let go, Mike. They may be able to haul you back, but not both of us."

"It's both," gritted Mike, "or neither!"

"But you'll only be dragging the others along, too. Can't you understand?"

"No." Mike grinned grimly as he was jolted upward. Then, as he slipped back downward, he added, "Yes."

Mike realized that Li had joined Chuba and Kamuka; that with Li's helping hand, they had managed a temporary lift, only to lose what little they had gained. But Mike still gripped Biff.

"Chandra will be helping them next," Mike said re-

assuringly. "With four pulling, it will make a difference."

"Yes, they'll manage to hold on a little longer," groaned Biff, "but it can't change things, Mike. They still can haul you up, if you'll only let go."

"Only I *won't* let go!"

A sharp sound was beating through Biff's brain. It came, "Crack—crack—crack—" in deadly monotone. He imagined he heard a new voice too, Chandra's voice, saying, "I'll be there, Biff!" Then came the "Crack—crack—" and again, "I'll be there—" closer, it seemed, and just below. For the first time, Biff steeled his nerve and looked down.

Chandra *was* there! On the curving brink itself, hanging to the ice where it was steeper than the spot where Biff himself was stretched. In his hand, Chandra held his axe, which he had retrieved after hurling it at the bear. With it, he was chopping into the ice, making those "Crack—crack—" sounds. Chandra hadn't gone up the steps to join the boys above. Instead, he had hacked steps of his own into the fringe of the icefall!

He'd made enough to gain hand and toeholds for himself. Working up from those at an outward angle, he had literally chopped a slanted ladder, climbing it as he did. Now he was denting the ice beside Biff's right ankle. That done, he shoved Biff's right foot into place. Biff shifted his weight in that direction. Instantly the strain on Mike lessened just enough for him to open his half-closed eyes and stare downward in wonder.

Crack—crack—crack—

There was a toehold for Biff's left foot now. That really eased the strain, for Mike's body immediately moved up a bit, pulled by the boys above. Chandra kept hacking, more steps, higher; Biff kept climbing the new ones, leaving the old to Chandra, who promptly followed. Then suddenly, Mike was up to safety and they were hauling Biff up, too, when he gasped:

"Wait! I'm bringing Chandra, too!"

So Biff was, for by now Chandra was tiring. He clung to Biff's leg with one hand and kept chopping steps with the other, just enough to work himself up. Then hands from above gripped Chandra, and he and Biff were hauled up side by side.

Kamuka found a board from an old catwalk and used it to bridge the gap across the missing stepping-stone. One by one, the boys crossed the frozen stream above the mammoth icefall. They found steps on the other side and descended for nearly half a mile before they overtook the party. Charles Keene, Barma Shah, Hurdu, and all the rest were waiting on a great, wide lookout platform, viewing a stupendously breath-taking scene.

There, set in a tremendous niche across the mile-deep gorge, was the Lost City of Chonsi. There were small stone huts in the foreground. These, if seen from straight above, would look like nothing more than rock heaps. But the pride of Chonsi, the palace of the Grand Lama, rose above a towering array of great stone steps and castellated walls forming tier

after tier of magnificent buildings to a height of nearly five hundred feet, only to be dwarfed by the more tremendous mass of the cliff that overhung it.

From the top of the great gorge it would be impossible even to glimpse this hidden wonder of the Himalayas in the massive hollow that had been hewn to contain it. Yet its relation to the gorge was such that sunlight streamed down into this secret setting during a good proportion of the day.

Barma Shah summed it up when he stated:

"There is an old saying: 'As long as the Himalayas stand, so will Chonsi.' Now I understand its meaning. If that cliff should tumble, the city would fall, too."

Amazed at the sight of the stupendous citadel, Biff did not tell his Uncle Charlie and Barma Shah about his near-plunge from the icefall. Instead, he reminded them of his mission:

"The sooner we get over there, the quicker we will find my father."

Both men agreed, but Barma Shah added, "You will have to see the Grand Lama first."

That was the part that worried Biff most, though he didn't say so. Now that he was practically at his goal, he felt shakier than ever, for the Chonsi Lama now represented power on a vast scale, considering the size of his secret stronghold.

The party continued down the granite trail, which zigzagged to the bottom of the canyon and there crossed a deep but narrow stream on a bridge of simple logs. At the other side, they came to a great wall, where gates were being swung wide to receive

There, across the mile-deep gorge, was the Lost City of Chonsi

them. They were ushered in by lesser lamas and other dignitaries, all wearing robes and costumes of an ancient day.

With Hurdu and the porters following, they were conducted up outer steps, then deep beneath a portico and up more steps until they reached a magnificently tiled inner courtyard, where they were bowed to rows of benches. An elderly lama approached and gestured to Biff, as he said, "You may come."

Next, he addressed Charles Keene and Barma Shah. "You two may follow." Then, to the boys, "And you next." Pausing, he looked toward the porters and asked, "Any of these?"

Barma Shah decided to bring Hurdu and three others. So, in the order as arranged, they entered another portico and climbed a short flight of gilded steps into a reception room also decorated in gold. There, Biff was told that he was to enter the throne-room of the Grand Lama alone, while Charles Keene and Barma Shah were to be ready when summoned.

Golden doors were opening when Uncle Charlie whispered to Biff, "Remember, you're meeting one of the wisest men in the East, as I can now believe. Pay close attention." To that, Biff nodded. Then, as trumpets blared, he was ushered through the doors, clutching the ruby that he had carried all along as his final passport to the Grand Lama's presence.

Then Biff reached a throne where a figure in great golden robes and peaked hat awaited him. On each side stood a solemn dignitary, each in similar robes. One asked in a droning tone, "You have brought the

Light of the Lama?" Then as Biff solemnly replied, "Yes," the other dignitary ordered, "Give it to the Great One."

No promises, no conditions, no mention of Biff's father. Just hand over the ruby and hope for the best. With a bow, Biff produced the magnificent red gem, which was glowing more vividly than ever. He placed it in the Chonsi Lama's outstretched left hand. Then, hoping to ask the obvious question, he looked up at the Great One.

Biff gasped despite himself. Instead of viewing the austere visage of a man in his mid-fifties, he was looking into the smiling, friendly face of a boy no older than himself. Still weighing the ruby in his left hand, the Chonsi Lama extended his right in greeting, as he said:

"Thank you, Biff!"

XX

The Master Spy

BEFORE Biff could recover from his astonishment, the Chonsi Lama nodded to one of the men beside him. A moment later, a door opened in the side of the room and Mr. Brewster entered, as brisk and smiling as when Biff had last seen him. A glad meeting followed. Then, with his arm around Biff's shoulder, Mr. Brewster approached the throne, where the youthful Lama handed him the ruby, saying, "I know you would like to see this, after all you have done to bring it here."

Biff suddenly felt very much at home with this boy who was so friendly toward his father.

"The ruby is sparkling now," said Biff, "but it changes sometimes and turns dull. That worried Diwan Chand."

"Due probably to the setting," observed Mr. Brewster with a smile. "If moisture gets beneath the gem, it detracts from the sparkle, but only temporarily."

"I am glad to hear that." The Chonsi Lama smiled,

as he took back the ruby. "I notice that its glow has lessened, and I do not care for bad omens."

As he placed the ruby in his robe, the Chonsi Lama turned to Biff again.

"Your father told me much about you," he said. "That was one reason why I wanted you to bring the ruby, as it was a good way to meet you. But we weren't quite ready to tell the world that I am now the Chonsi Lama. At last we can declare it."

He turned to one of the robed dignitaries.

"Usher in the others," he ordered. Then, as an afterthought, he added, "Bring the boys in first."

As Biff and his father stepped to one side, Mr. Brewster quietly explained that the former Chonsi Lama had died a few years after his visit to Leh, some twenty years before.

"He gave orders to keep his death a secret," explained Biff's father, "until times became less troubled. So a boy who was born at the time the old Lama died was chosen to succeed him. He grew up on the throne, and there he is now. I was as much surprised as you when I met him."

More surprises were due. As Biff's friends were ushered in, they looked as awed as Biff had been when he approached the throne. Awe turned to amazement when the boy Lama greeted them each by name and gave them the same winning smile that he had shown Biff.

"Bring in the others," the Chonsi Lama ordered, referring to Charles Keene and Barma Shah. He turned to Mr. Brewster. "I shall now officially an-

nounce that your mission is complete," he said. "The Light of the Lama has been returned. Since it was restored by the present government of India, I shall ally myself with that nation for our mutual advantage. As for the trouble you encountered at the gold mines, it still has puzzling factors—"

The Chonsi Lama broke off to greet the newcomers who were being ushered in. To Charles Keene, he said cordially, "I know you must be Biff's uncle." Then, turning to the other man, he added, "And you are Barma Shah—"

Mr. Brewster was coming forward in quick interruption to confront the bland man with the broad face and the wide ears. Biff, accustomed to his father's calm, was surprised to hear Mr. Brewster exclaim excitedly, "Wait! This man is not Barma Shah. He is an impostor! I have never seen him before!"

"No, I am not Barma Shah," the impostor stated. "But are you sure we haven't met? Don't you remember—"

He drew his hands over his ears, pursed his lips and narrowed his eyes to thin slits as he leered mockingly at Biff's father. His complete change of appearance was startling.

"The spy we nearly trapped down at the mine!" Mr. Brewster exclaimed. "You are Bela Kron, the man who was after the ruby!"

"Yes, I am Bela Kron," the master spy answered, smiling. "And I took the place of your friend Barma Shah after he was killed in a Calcutta riot of a month ago. Now, I am taking over here!"

Kron, the pretended Barma Shah, was drawing a revolver from his pocket. He had raised his voice and it must have carried beyond the golden doors, for they suddenly burst open to admit Hurdu and the three men with him. No longer were the Changpas carrying bows and arrows. Hurdu had a revolver, and the others were similarly armed.

Efficiently, Kron motioned the robed dignitaries to one corner of the throne room, Thomas Brewster and Charles Keene to another, Biff and the boys to a third. That left the youthful Chonsi Lama still on his throne—for how long was a question, though he took the situation calmly.

Pleased by the way he and his picked crew had taken over, Bela Kron decided to enlarge upon it.

"I started the trouble at the mines," he bragged. "I wanted to acquire the Rajah's ruby as a passport to bring me to this hidden citadel, so I could either make my own terms with the Chonsi Lama, or else notify certain foreign factions just where they could find him. Brewster beat me here, but when I learned his son was bringing the ruby, I decided to come along with him."

With a mocking look toward Biff, Kron swept his hand around his head, turban fashion, then downward from his chin to indicate a beard.

"Remember that Sikh in the bus?" he demanded. "The one with the false beard? I was that Sikh. That's how I picked up your trail. I saw Chandra buy the tickets, and I purposely crossed your path later.

"For other reasons, I had helped stir the Kali cult

into making trouble, but I didn't know they were hot after you. So from then on, I looked out for you, knowing that as Barma Shah, your father's friend and contact, you would bring me here. I saved your life during the tiger hunt, and again, when the bear was after you. I tried to get rid of your uncle on the bridge, because I didn't want him in the way. So I had Hurdu cut the cable."

Kron glanced at Hurdu, who shrugged apologetically.

"Hurdu was slow that time," declared Kron, "but he did a good job faking Yeti tracks to scare Tikse and his crew clear back to Leh, so we could hire the Changpas, who were waiting in the valley where the trails met."

It seemed that Bela Kron, the master spy, had called every possible turn. But he had a still bigger trick to play.

"My men are stationed in the courtyard below," he declared. "I shall have Hurdu send two of his men down and bring the rest up." He waved toward the door, and Hurdu promptly started the two men on their way. "Then we shall leave, taking you with us." Kron approached the Chonsi Lama as he spoke. "It will take all the wealth of this hidden city to make the first payment on your ransom."

Calmly, the youthful Lama studied Kron, then smiled as though ready to accept whatever fate decreed. Kron responded with a glare, then swung to view the others in the same ugly fashion.

"I'll soon decide what to do with the rest of you,"

Kron began. "In fact—" he paused as a heavy rap sounded on the golden door—"I'll decide right now, because Hurdu's men are back. Let them in, Hurdu."

Hurdu turned and opened the door. As he did, he came flying back as though a tornado had hit him. Hurdu's gun scaled from his hand as he landed hard and flat. The one man still with Hurdu was jumping in to help him, only to be sprawled in the same efficient fashion.

Now, Biff saw the man with the double-barreled fists who had played the part of a human whirlwind. Biff raised a shout that the other boys echoed:

"Muscles!"

XXI

Secret of the Snows

BELA KRON, though standing ready with his gun, was caught flatfooted by the speed and power that Muscles showed. Kron was a crack shot, but he had to wait until Hurdu and the other husky guard were out of the way before he could open fire. In his eagerness to concentrate on Muscles, Kron forgot two others.

Those two were Thomas Brewster and Charles Keene. Knowing exactly how far Muscles could carry his drive, Biff's father and uncle acted accordingly. At the crucial moment, they launched a double drive of their own. Kron, coming to deliberate aim as Muscles hulked up as a target, was suddenly overwhelmed before he could pull the trigger of his gun.

Excitedly, Biff and the other boys were pointing to the outer room where more figures were appearing, but Muscles motioned for them to be calm. Then, through the doorway, came Tikse and half a dozen of his Ladakhi crew. Amiably, Muscles waved them out, saying, "Never mind, boys, you won't be needed."

The men from Leh realized suddenly that they were

in the presence of the Chonsi Lama, and that in itself accomplished results. Bowing low, they backed out through the golden doors. Gravely, the Chonsi Lama returned their bows until they were gone. Then he turned to Biff and said, "If you introduce your friend Muscles, I will grant him an audience. Then he can tell his story of how he turned the tables."

Biff introduced Muscles, who responded characteristically.

"Everything's under control," he said, "so I can take time out to talk. It seems like talking is getting to be the best thing I do. Those Sherpas we landed among thought I was what they called a Yeti, but I talked them out of it.

"Then they were so glad, they were ready to do anything I wanted, so I talked them into coming over this way and catching up with the party that was on its way here, just on the chance I might be needed.

"We tried to take a short cut and whom did we run into?" Muscles turned to Biff. "Your whole crew of porters, heading back to Leh. When they told me they'd been seeing Yeti tracks, I figured somebody had been faking them."

"Somebody was," returned Biff. "Hurdu."

The Chonsi Lama was becoming more and more intrigued. He expressed the eagerness felt by all the boys when he suddenly urged, "Go on, Muscles, tell us more!"

"Well, your honor," Muscles resumed, suddenly impressed by the youthful Lama's robe, "I did some

more talking to Tikse and his friends. I told them that there weren't any such things as Yetis, and that having been mistaken for one, I was somebody who should know. So they turned right around and came along with me.

"Then, to convince them further, I rigged myself up in an old yak hide and wrapped old towels around my shoes, so I could scare Hurdu and his tribe into thinking they were really looking at a Yeti and not just his footprints."

"So you were the thing we saw go bounding up the ledge!" exclaimed Biff.

"That's right," said Muscles. "I kept on going, too, clear up beyond a big rock pile."

Chandra turned to Biff. "You see? I was right."

"It was dark when I started out," continued Muscles, "so I brought a rifle with me. I'd left it up behind the rock pile, and when I saw you tangling with that big bear, I up and clipped him, first shot. There was other shooting coming from down your way, so I had my chance to clear out and did."

"And you followed us from then on?" queried Biff.

"Sure did," returned Muscles. "We saw you go into a woods and disappear, so we did the same and found the steps that brought us down here. They let us in when I said I was with you, Biff, so I guess you're pretty important around here."

"Biff is important here," declared the Chonsi Lama. "Very important."

"I decided to take over," Muscles went on, "when

we found a lot of Hurdu's men down in the courtyard. We jumped them before they knew what to expect. They knew, though, when they got it. I came on up and ran into a couple of Hurdu's men coming down. So I bagged them and turned them over to my crew. Then I walked in here, and you saw the rest."

It was time now for the Chonsi Lama to hold a conference with his advisers, so he politely bowed his visitors and rescuers out. On the way down from the throne room, Biff said to Muscles, "So you don't believe there are such things as Yetis?"

"I didn't when I came here," returned Muscles, "but after one look at this place, I am ready to believe anything."

They left Bela Kron, Hurdu, and a few of his men in the custody of the palace guards, a dozen men in garish red-and-yellow uniforms whose chief business was blowing trumpets, opening doors, and participating in ceremonies generally. The guards were armed with brass muskets that looked like models of ancient Chinese cannon and probably hadn't been fired since the day gunpowder was invented.

The guards were good custodians, however, for the massive buildings forming the foundations of the slant-walled palace were honeycombed with secret passages and hidden cells. Escape was impossible, even for Bela Kron, the master spy, and his principal followers.

As for the rest, they were simply Changpa tribesmen who had been coaxed in from remote Tibet by Hurdu, just as Muscles had brought in the visiting Sherpas from Nepal. By now, Sherpas and Changpas

were becoming friends, rather than one group having the other in its charge. The Ladakhi, too, were fraternizing with both groups and all were so overwhelmed by the importance of the Chonsi Lama that they were ready to follow his commands. So they were given the freedom of the fabulous city until the time should come for them to return to their native climes.

Mr. Brewster sat in on the conferences held by the Chonsi Lama and his advisers, with Charles Keene an occasional participant in the deliberations. During breaks in the session, they chatted with Biff and the other boys, who were lodged in special guest quarters with Muscles.

"When the previous Lama died," Mr. Brewster stated, "he saw to it that his successor would be educated in modern ways as well as those of ancient days. Your friend, the young Lama, had an English tutor and is versed in other modern languages as well. He is now just sixteen years old and has two more years to go until he is of age.

"The two men you saw with him were the Acting Regent and the Prime Minister, who have been keeping Chonsi as it was, until the new Grand Lama takes full power. But now that the Rajah's ruby has been returned to become again the Light of the Lama, they have decided that this is their day of decision. All agree that Chonsi no longer should be the Lost City."

That became official the next day. The natives of Chonsi were told that they were free to visit the outer world without restriction. The Chonsi Lama entrusted Mr. Brewster with state despatches to be taken to

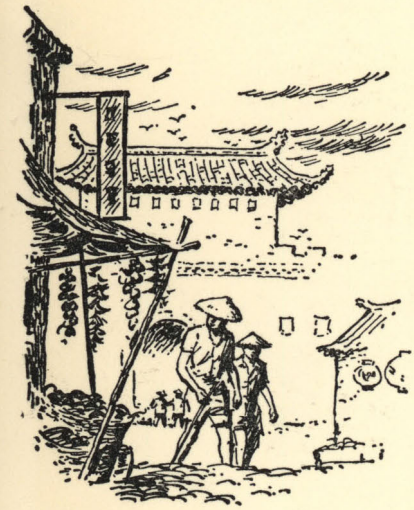
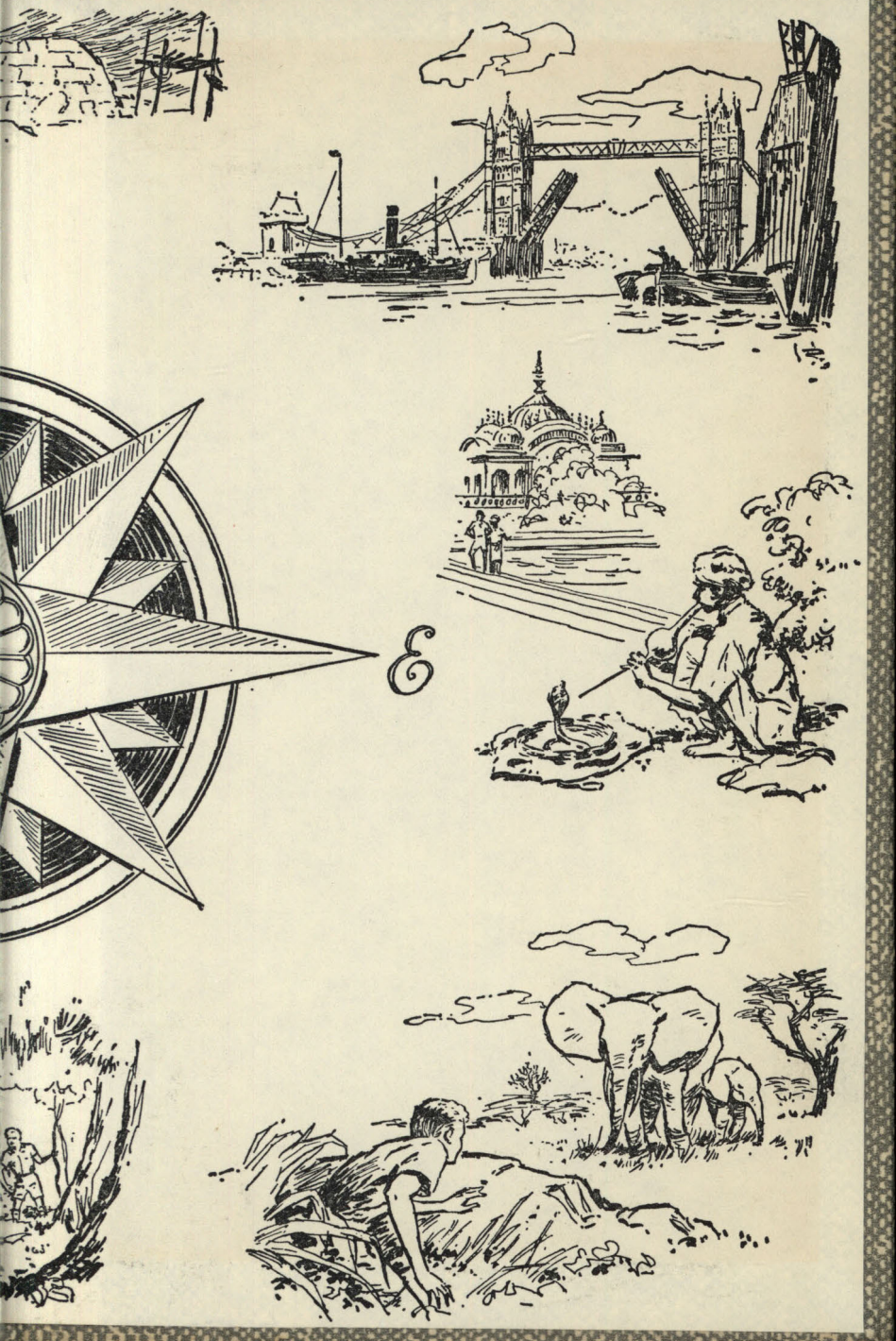
New Delhi, so that the boundaries of tiny Chonsi could be defined and its status determined through international negotiations. Bela Kron, Hurdu, and a few others were to be turned over to the government of India, as they were wanted for crimes committed within the jurisdiction of that nation.

Biff and the boys had a last pleasant visit with the Chonsi Lama and then were on their way. All Chonsi was out to wave farewell to the departing visitors. From the distance came booming sounds like a parting salute, but not from guns. Those were the reverberations from the crashing masses of rock and ice that so frequently toppled from the granite walls that flanked this narrow land, the Place of Living Thunder.

All the porters and native tribesmen made the return climb from the mile-deep chasm and back through the mountain passes beyond. There were no serious incidents along the way, as the expedition no longer was troubled with plotters such as Bela Kron and Hurdu. Instead of returning to Leh with the Ladakhi, Biff and his father and the rest of the party continued south to the ranges where the Sherpas lived.

There, Charles Keene and Muscles put the plane in flying order, and after a few pleasant days in the fertile valley, the first group took off for New Delhi. Charles Keene was at the controls. With him were Mr. Brewster, Biff, Chandra, and Kamuka, all of whom could give first-hand evidence concerning the double dealings of the notorious Bela Kron.

Charles Keene was then to fly back to the Sherpa

valley and pick up Muscles, Li, Chuba, and Mike Arista, to bring them on to New Delhi, where all the boys would meet again. But as the plane climbed high above the mountain pass, thoughts of a more immediate reunion flashed through Biff's mind and brought an anticipatory smile to his lips.

By the time they reached New Delhi, Biff's mother would be there from Darjeeling, with the twins. Eyes half closed, Biff could already picture the eager, faces of Ted and Monica as his brother and sister waited breathlessly to hear the full story of his latest adventures!